

A HISTORY OF MARINE OBSERVATION SQUADRON SIX



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

VMO-6 often possessed both fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft to carry out its assigned missions. The unit's "composite" nature is nicely captured in this Korean War-vintage photograph of a squadron HO3S-1 helicopter and an OE observation airplane. (Department of Defense [USMC] Photo A131131)

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by

Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker, USMC

and

Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., USMC



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FOREWORD

This history is one of a series being prepared by the History and Museums Division to bring to light the achievements and contributions of individual squadrons to Marine aviation.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 distinguished itself throughout a period which spanned nearly five decades and three major conflicts, but its most significant contribution to Marine aviation was its pioneering use of helicopters in combat.

Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker and Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., are co-authors of this history. Lieutenant Colonel Parker, who holds a bachelor of science degree from the University of Baltimore and a master of arts degree from Pepperdine University, prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Major Batha, who has a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Utah and a master of arts degree from the University of West Florida, prepared the comment edition and final draft. Both officers are experienced helicopter pilots who served combat tours in Vietnam.

It is our hope that this history will be read as a tribute to the men who have contributed to the accomplishments of the squadron, and it is our desire that readers feel free to comment on the narrative as well as provide any additional information or illustrations which might enhance a future edition.



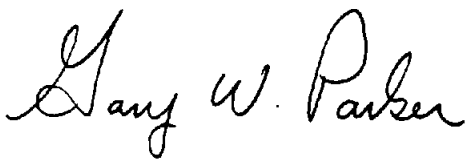
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PREFACE

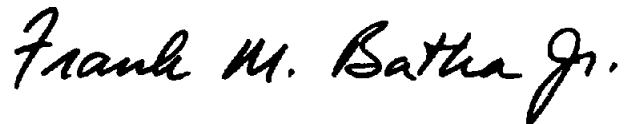
This history is written to provide a concise operational narrative about a distinguished Marine Corps unit. Marine Observation Squadron 6's wide variety of experiences closely parallels the larger story of Marine aviation. From the 1920s through the Vietnam era, VMO-6 provided the kind of outstanding air support Marines have come to expect.

The authors wish to extend their appreciation to the professional staff of the History and Museums Division, whose help greatly assisted in completing this project. Special mention and thanks go to: Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Chief Historian, for his editorial assistance; Mr. Richard A. "Buzz" Hillman for his preparation of maps and book design; Mrs. Regina H. Strother (formerly of the History and Museums Division Photo Archives Section, an agency since absorbed into the Defense Audiovisual Agency) for her diligent efforts in supplying many of the photographs used; and to our typesetters, Corporal Joseph J. Hynes and Lance Corporal Mark J. Zigante.

In general, photographs which were taken prior to World War II are held at the National Archives and Records Service (NARS), Still Pictures Branch, Room 18N, 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest, Washington, D.C., 20408. Photographs of World War II subjects and subsequent events are held by the Defense Audiovisual Agency (DAVA), Building 168, Anacostia Naval Station, Washington, D.C., 20374.



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An OE-2 "Bird Dog" from VMO-6 flies a training mission in 1956 near Camp Pendleton, California.



A History of Marine Observation Squadron Six

*The Early Years—World War II and China Service—Korea and the Advent of Helicopters
Pendleton Once More—Combat: Vietnam—Tenancy on Okinawa and Decommissioning*

The Early Years

Marine Observation Squadron 6 antecedents reach back to the 1920 activation of Flight E, 3d Air Squadron at Quantico, Virginia. Frequent modifications of the Marine Corps' aviation structure during the formative years caused a succession of unit redesignations. The term "division" was substituted for "flight" in 1922 in order to coincide with Navy aeronautical terminology, and Flight E, 3d Air Squadron was redesignated Division 1, Fighting Squadron 1. In 1925 another reorganization brought with it unit redesignation to Division 1, Marine Observation Squadron 3, and on 1 July 1927, this designation was changed to Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VO-6M).¹

The squadron's abbreviation, VO-6M, described the unit in a manner still essentially in use today. "V" denoted a heavier than air unit. "O" indicated the squadron's primary mission was observation. "6" represented the fact that it was the sixth such unit formed, and "M" distinguished it as a Marine rather than Navy squadron.^{2*}

Activities during VO-6M's first six months were typical of all Marine Corps squadrons during the 1920s. Assigned to Aircraft Squadrons, East Coast Expeditionary Force, Quantico, Virginia, the squadron was manned with six officers and 33 enlisted Marines. It possessed six aircraft: two DH-4B-1 "Liberty Plane" biplanes; one Loening OL-2 amphibian biplane; two Consolidated NY-1 convertible biplane trainers; and one Vought VE-7 biplane trainer. Using these assets of men and aircraft, the

squadron trained for its observation mission and provided preliminary flight training for student naval aviators and naval aviation pilots.** It wasn't long, however, before the squadron was doing more than merely training.

In early 1927 the 2d Marine Brigade, an expeditionary force composed of Marine Corps ground and aviation units, was sent into Nicaragua to assist the Diaz government in quelling the revolutionary activity of insurgents led by General Jose Maria Moncada, and by June the internal disorders appeared to have been resolved. The brigade's strength was significantly reduced because of the bright outlook, but the political truce was quickly shattered when one of Moncada's lieutenants, Augusto Sandino, broke away from his leader and directed a resurgence of rebel activity. To meet the Sandinista threat American reinforcements were required, and VO-6M was among the units designated to join the brigade.

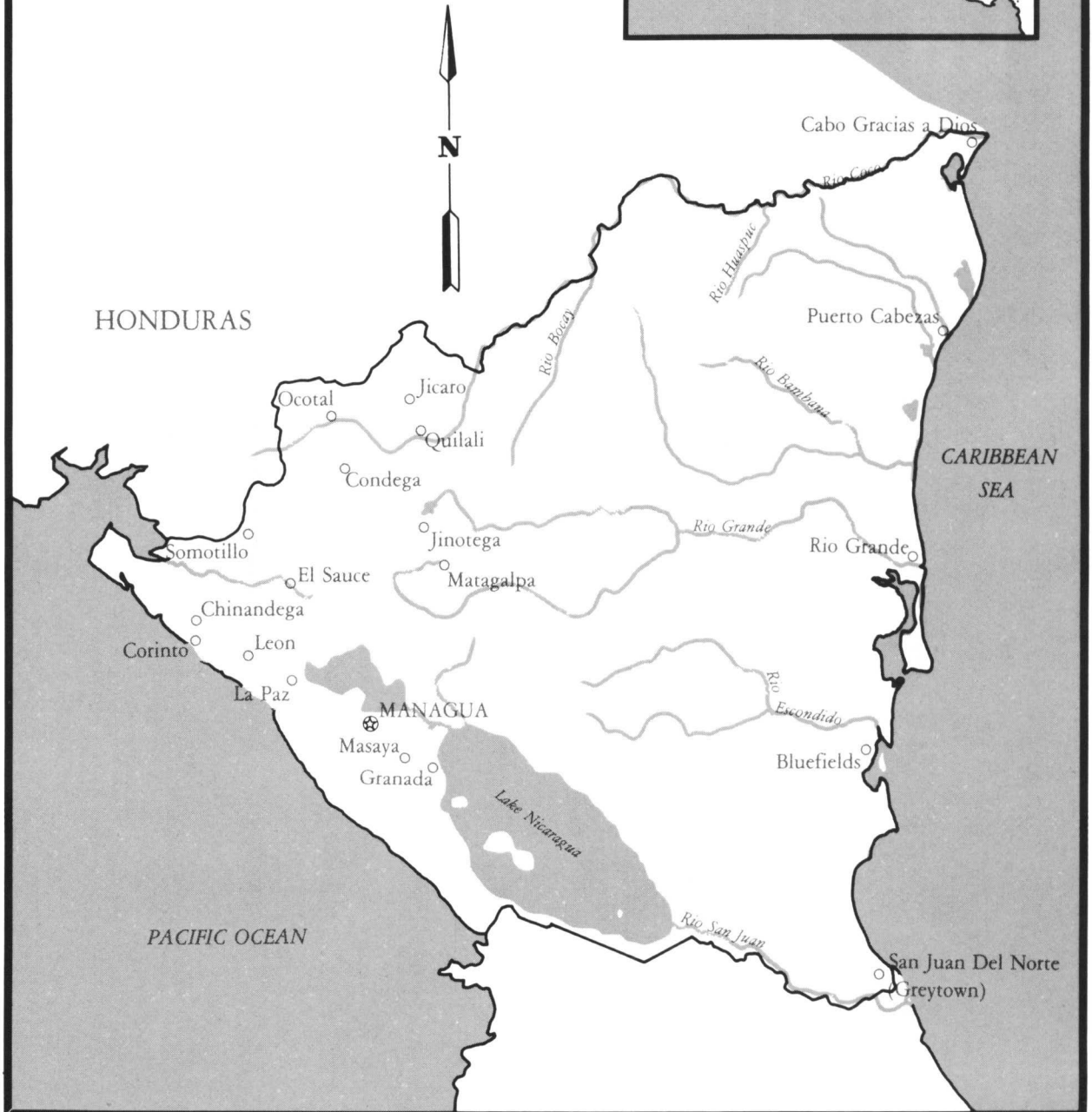
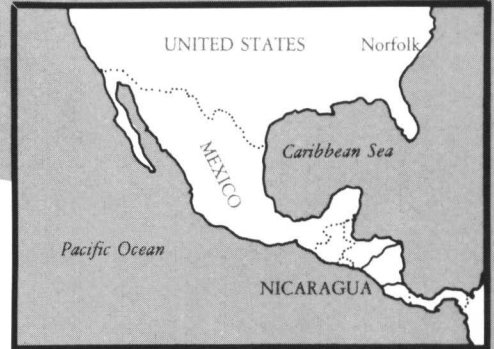
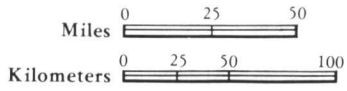
Departing from Quantico on 27 January 1928, the squadron delayed for a day at the Hampton Roads Naval Base before boarding the USS *Saratoga* for further transportation to Nicaragua. After three weeks of travel, which included six days of delay in the Panama Canal Zone, the squadron disembarked at Corinto, Nicaragua, on 16 February and proceeded to Managua by rail.

The reception of VO-6M had been well arranged for by the other Marine aviation unit in Nicaragua, Marine Observation Squadron 7 (VO-7M). When the train carrying VO-6M arrived in Nicaragua it was shunted out to the aviation siding where the newcomers were welcomed. The sense of camaraderie which existed in Marine aviation during those early years may be gleaned from the descrip-

*In the 1940s, most squadrons began using three digit numerical designations which reflected the Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) and Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) to which they were assigned, e.g., VMF-311 was the first fighter squadron assigned to MAG-31 in the 3d MAW and VMF-312 was the second fighter squadron formed in MAG-31.

**During the 1920s Marines attended a "wash out" course of preliminary flight training prior to going to the Navy's flight school at Pensacola, Florida. It should also be noted that enlisted personnel were assigned as naval aviation pilots (NAP), and in fact twelve of VO-6M's enlisted men were NAPs.

NICARAGUA



tion of VO-6M's arrival by Major Ross E. Rowell, the brigade air officer, in his weekly operations report.

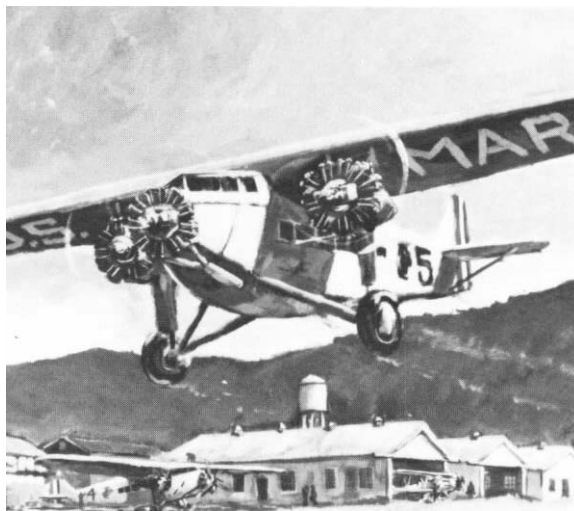
When the train pulled into the station in Nicaragua on the 16th, the heads sticking out of the coach windows were a sight for sore eyes. "Pop" Stewart, Archie Paschal, Tommie Whitman, "Skinny" Leeper, Joe Kittle, and many others of the old guard of Quantico. . . . They were welcomed by the squadron here, and many facetious remarks were made. Chow was ready for them, tents up and wired with electric lights, and board floors laid, so all they had to do, was move in. Most of them spent the next day in shaking down and asked if the dust was always blowing as bad as it was then. When being told that they would wish for dust when the rain started, they looked at each other as much to say, "What kind of a place is this?"³

It was not too long before the new arrivals were busily at work. Instruction in signal panels and message pick-up was given to the pilots, flight personnel were instructed in the use of the aviation ordinance, and all hands received familiarization with the Thompson sub-machine gun which was being used at the field guard posts. On the 21st, the first contact with a Sandinista group occurred when a plane on patrol attacked and dispersed a group of "outlaws" at Tuma.

Aviation operations in Nicaragua were carried out under extremely trying conditions. The terrain was heavily forested and mountainous, with elevations reaching 6,000 to 7,000 feet. The significant meteorological characteristic of the region was an eight-month-long rainy season which featured severe

Although VO-6M had a primary mission to provide aerial observation support to the 2d Brigade in Nicaragua, it operated the Curtiss F8C-1 Falcon in an all-purpose role. (Soon after its introduction into service the Falcon was redesignated the OC-1.)

National Archives and Records Service Photo NH71624



U.S. Marine Corps Combat Art Collection

The squadron's pioneering use of transport aircraft for resupply in Nicaragua inspired this painting by LtCol Albert M. "Mike" Leahy, USMCR (Ret.).

thunderstorms. There were few landing fields, and open spaces for forced landings were almost nonexistent. Further, because flight operations were conducted over territory controlled by the rebels, downed crewmen literally faced life or death escape situations.⁴

Marine Corps ground operations in Nicaragua were conducted under equally difficult conditions. A crude trail network which became nearly impassable during the rainy season, lack of radio communications, and the wide dispersal of troops made aviation support indispensable. VO-6M provided much of this support by flying a variety of missions.

Using its initial complement of three Curtiss F8C-1 "Falcon" biplanes, it conducted visual reconnaissance, aerial photography, infantry liaison, emergency resupply, and light attack. The latter task commonly took the form of strafing and bombing attacks in advance of foot patrols, an example of the close air support which had been developing in Nicaragua since the VO-7M dive-bombing attack at Ocotal the previous July.⁵

VO-6M was also assigned transport aircraft in Nicaragua. Using three Atlantic TA-1 three-engine monoplanes and an Atlantic TA-2, the squadron pioneered aerial resupply on a new, large scale.⁶

The success of VO-6M's air transport mission, in fact, provided some of the rationale behind plans to "transfer" the squadron's colors back to Quantico.

The Commandant's request for approval of the administrative movement (i.e., on paper only) of Marine Utility Squadron 6 (VJ-6M) to Nicaragua and the "return" of VO-6M to Quantico was based on the large amount of utility flying being done by transports in Nicaragua. There was also a requirement for an additional squadron at Quantico which could provide training in two-place planes for pilots who would later go to Nicaragua as replacements.⁷ The Chief of Naval Operations accepted the justifications presented, and on 1 September 1928, VO-6M and VJ-6M "exchanged" locations.⁸

With the colors of VO-6M again at Quantico, the squadron became involved with a variety of tasks in the ensuing years. The most important task it performed was the training of new pilots, and in this regard it not only trained regular Marine Corps pilots but it also conducted a school of advanced flying and basic line duty for reserve officers. The squadron also sponsored an aviation mechanics course for voluntary attendees.

Other tasks carried out by the squadron were of a more diverse nature. Flight demonstrations were provided for the Field Officers Class of the Marine Corps Schools. Simulated combat air support was given to an expeditionary brigade conducting a series of landing operations on the Potomac River. These operations were closely related to the squadron's military missions. On the other hand, mosquito dusting around Quantico in support of the Post Sanitary Department and flying daily fire patrols in cooperation with the Virginia Forest Service were a

little less militarily oriented, but provided both helpful service to the community and good flight practice to the pilots. One final mission which attained a degree of routine as well as minor importance was the delivery of the President's mail to his camp at Rapidan, Virginia.⁹

The number and types of aircraft possessed by VO-6M after its "return" to Quantico was varied, but until September 1930 the most versatile of these had been the Vought O2U-1 "Corsair" observation biplane. A tandem, two-seated aircraft, the Corsair carried one forward firing machine gun, and could be fitted with additional guns and bomb racks. Capable of operating from land bases or carriers, floats could also be installed to make the aircraft amphibious.¹⁰

In October 1930, the squadron upgraded its aircraft inventory with the acceptance of the Curtiss F8C-5 "Helldiver" (later redesignated the O2C-1). An improved model of the Falcon aircraft used by VO-6M in Nicaragua, the Helldiver was built for observation duties but possessed excellent dive-bombing characteristics as well.¹¹ The combination of aircraft capabilities, aircrew dive-bombing experiences in Nicaragua, and national enthusiasm with aviation in the 1930s inspired one of the most colorful periods in the history of VO-6M when the unit became involved in a series of Marine Corps public relations events at various air races and airport openings. The squadron organized a six-plane flight demonstration team which by 20 February 1931 made its debut at the opening of the airport at New

After its return to Quantico, VO-6M used a variety of aircraft. Pictured on the left is the Curtiss OC-2 Falcon. The aircraft on the right is the Vought O2U-1 Corsair.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 517612



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 517620





(Marine Corps Aviation Museum)

Squadron personnel and aircraft are lined up for inspection prior to their participation at the Canadian Air Pageant. Note the "Acey-Duecy" paint scheme on the cowling and vertical stabilizers of the squadron's F8C-5 Helldivers (later redesignated the O2C-1).

Bern, North Carolina. Calling themselves the Helldivers to go along with both the name of the plane they were flying as well as some of the maneuvers they were featuring, they impressed spectators so favorably that by 1932 they were representing the Marine Corps at major events such as the Canadian Air Pageant in Montreal and the U.S. National Air Races in Cleveland. In order to enhance their demonstrations VO-6M was expanded to a nine plane unit, the aircraft were attractively painted, special clothing was issued to the ground crews, and all the pilots were given special training in "ground strafing and light bombing" tactics.* As can be envisioned, the squadron provided quite a show—but it was based on tactical flying rather than theatrics. The demonstrations received wide publicity through favorable press notices, a live radio broadcast, and even national showing on movie newsreels.¹²

However, just as times had been opportune for VO-6M to become a unique, highly visible organization, it was also external circumstances which ended the first chapter in the squadron's history. The Marine Corps had the mission of defending advanced bases, and to better accomplish this mission the Commandant had recommended that a twelve-

plane light-bombing squadron be incorporated into the 1934 Naval Aeronautical Organization.¹³ The Chief of Naval Operations accepted the recommendation, but no increase in total Marine Corps squadrons was authorized. The addition of a Marine bombing squadron would require the disestablishment of some other Marine squadron, and it was determined that the Marine Corps could most afford to "lose" an observation squadron.¹⁴

At midnight on 30 June 1933, VO-6M was disbanded and disappeared from the active Marine Corps rolls.**

World War II and China Service

The requirement to provide Marine divisions engaged in combat in the Pacific with critically need-

**The Naval Appropriations Bill of 1929 provided the means for the Marine Corps to institute a five-year program to revive its aging Reserve aviation organization. One feature of the plan called for the establishment of two reserve divisions which would augment VO-6M to wartime strength should mobilization occur. In 1932 a reserve division (VO-6MR) was established, at Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, New York, remaining there until 1 July 1935, when its designation was changed to VO-2MR. In conjunction with this VO-7MR, which was located at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base, World-Chamberlain Airport, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was redesignated VO-6MR. In 1937 all observation squadrons were redesignated as scouting squadrons and VO-6MR became VMS-6R.

*It should be noted that VO-6M was augmented by pilots from all of the squadrons at Quantico for these large airshows.

ed aerial observation and artillery spotting capabilities lead to the authorization of a new breed of observation squadron in 1943.* Recognizing the Army's success with the direct assignment of light observation aircraft to field artillery battalions, the Marine Corps decided to do something along similar lines. The Marines' new observation squadrons were to be attached to artillery units for tactical control, but were to remain in the marine aircraft wing for administrative control.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (now VMO-6) was reactivated on 20 November 1944, at the U. S. Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Virginia. On activation the unit had a strength of eight officers and 26 enlisted men under the temporary command of First Lieutenant Thomas G. Alderson. Alderson commanded the squadron for only a few days until Captain Donald R. Garrett arrived and assumed command on 23 November 1944.

The squadron's primary mission was to conduct aerial observation and artillery direction, and because both the mission and aircraft type were new the squadron officers were chosen at random from fighter, dive bomber, bomber, and transport squadron pilots. Reporting to Quantico for duty, they underwent intensive training in aircraft familiarization, small field landings and take offs, aerial observation and photography, and artillery spotting procedures. Further, they were given orientations on artillery unit organizational structure and equipment, as well as ground unit tactics. The pilots trained in the OY-1 "Sentinel," a two-seat, single-wing light observation and liaison aircraft.** The OY-1, built by the Stinson Aircraft Division of the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, had an aluminum and wood framework with fabric covering and was powered by a 185-horsepower Lycoming O-435-1 six-cylinder, horizontally opposed, air-cooled engine. The plane had a maximum airspeed of 129 miles per hour and an altitude ceiling of 15,800 feet.¹⁶

The squadron remained at Quantico and continued training until 26 December 1944, when it left for the west coast. On New Year's Day 1945, VMO-6

arrived at the Marine Corps Air Depot, Camp Miramar, San Diego, California, and was assigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast. On 25 January VMO-6 was transferred to Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (AirFMFPac) for administrative purposes and to the 6th Marine Division for operational control. The same day, all hands of VMO-6, eight officers and 29 enlisted men, boarded the attack transport USS *Renville* (APA 227) and sailed for the Solomon Islands the next morning. The *Renville* crossed the equator on 8 February and the traditional ritual of initiating all "pollywogs" into the Order of the Golden Dragon and the Ancient Order of the Deep was strictly observed.***

The *Renville*, with VMO-6 on board, arrived at Guadalcanal on 10 February 1945, and the squadron was operationally attached to the 15th Marines of the 6th Marine Division. During the squadron's stay at Guadalcanal there were no aircraft available for flight training, so while the officers remained ashore the enlisted men were put on board the attack cargo ship USS *Caswell* (AKA 72) as part of the ship's platoon and took part in training maneuvers.

VMO-6 joined the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing in March, and on 8 March, Technical Sergeant Glenn R. Hunter, a naval aviation pilot and member of VMO-6, received and accepted a commission to second lieutenant. Two days later, Hunter and the other officers of VMO-6 boarded air transportation and departed for Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands. The long flight required overnight stops at Manus Island in the Admiralties, and the island of Peleliu in the Palau Islands. The officers finally reached Ulithi Atoll on 12 March and waited for the remainder of the squadron.

The enlisted Marines of the squadron, still on board the *Caswell*, departed Guadalcanal on 15 March to rendezvous with the officers who had been split up and berthed on five different aircraft carriers.**** With the arrival of the *Caswell* at Ulithi Atoll on 21 March, the squadron was finally in the same general location, but still on board different ships. Their respective ships left together for the

*Until the creation of these new light aviation units, the closest approximation the Marine Corps had to an observation squadron was the photographic fighter squadron (VMF(P)).¹⁵

**The Consolidated OY series and later the Cessna OE series of observation aircraft were commonly, although incorrectly, referred to as "Grasshoppers," a name only properly used in conjunction with the Piper NE/HE/AE series of aircraft.

***A "pollywog" is one of several names used to describe those personnel who have not crossed the equator on a naval ship and been initiated to commemorate the occasion. Once the ceremony is over a "pollywog" becomes a "shellback."

****The five escort carriers (CVEs) which shared in the transport of the pilots and their aircraft were: USS *Petrof Bay*, USS *Rudyard Bay*, USS *Tulagi*, USS *Saginaw Bay*, and the USS *Chenango*.¹⁷

Ryukyu Islands as part of the convoy for the assault on the Japanese island of Okinawa.

L-Day for the assault on Okinawa was 1 April 1945. The landing force commander, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, USA, employed the Marines' III Amphibious Corps (III AC) and the Army's XXIV Corps as the northern and southern landing forces of his Tenth Army. III AC, commanded by Major General Roy S. Geiger, had the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions for maneuvering elements. On L-Day the two corps landed abreast on Okinawa's western beaches near Hagushi. Meeting no opposition they pushed rapidly inland, and captured their primary L-Day objectives of Yontan and Kadena airfields. The capture of these airfields permitted the early use of land-based air.

Launching from the CVEs on L + 1, VMO-6 aircrews flew to Yontan airfield and began operations.* Command relations were different than originally planned, in that III AC Artillery took operational control of VMO-6 from the 6th Marine Division due to the failure of VMO-7, the squadron originally assigned to III AC Artillery, to arrive in time for the landing.¹⁸ Even so, squadron flight operations were generally in support of the 6th Division. VMO-6 aircraft were also used by the pilots of VMO-2 to support the 1st Marine Division.¹⁹

The squadron flew artillery spotting, reconnaissance, message delivery, wire laying, and general utility missions. Most of the flights were flown over enemy territory at altitudes of 2,000 feet or less, placing the pilots and aerial observers under frequent fire from antiaircraft batteries and small arms.**

Exposure to hostile fire was aggravated during the initial stages of the operation due to coordination problems caused by lack of a central agency for authorizing flights. In the confusion, the squadron made several unauthorized flights on which aircraft were hit by enemy fire while loitering over enemy territory waiting for mission assignments.

*The carrier launches represented the first flying the VMO-6 pilots had done since leaving the states. Happily, the OY's short take-off characteristics and the CVE's ability to provide optimum launch conditions made for an uneventful operation.²⁰

**The aerial observers (AOs) were ground officers assigned from artillery regiments, not from aviation squadrons. The AOs usually logged as many flight hours as the pilots, because the majority of VMO tasks called for joint pilot/AO participation.

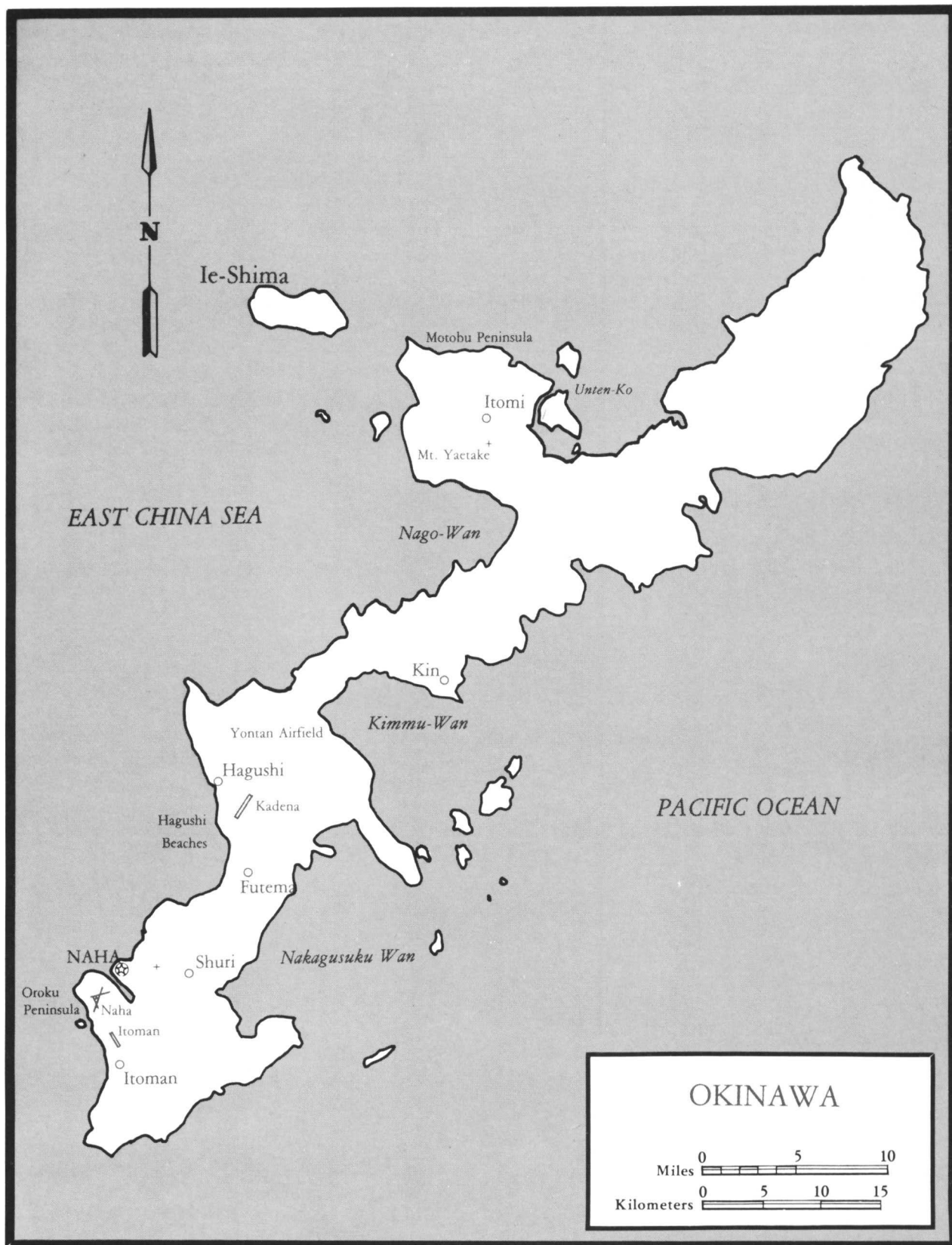


Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 123728

During the Okinawa campaign squadron aircraft operated from the crudest of "airstrips." Here an OY-1 takes off from a road near the front lines.

During the month of April the squadron lost three Marines. Private Richard J. O'Donnell was wounded in action during a Japanese daylight bombing raid on 6 April, and died two hours later from multiple shrapnel wounds. On 8 April, Second Lieutenant Emanuel Moyses and his observer, First Lieutenant John R. Parsons, were shot down by enemy machine gun fire while directing artillery fire over Motobu Peninsula, and on 10 April, Second Lieutenant Charles Hanmer was forced down while on an artillery mission over Motobu Peninsula when a sudden rainstorm moved in from the China Sea restricting visibility. During his last radio communication, Hanmer reported he was lost, running out of fuel, and going down at sea. A radio bearing of Hanmer's position was taken by the ground station at Kadena and Air-Sea Rescue started a search at once. No trace of Hanmer or his aircraft was found. Also lost was First Lieutenant James L. Frink, an aerial observer from the 15th Marines. With the losses of Moyses, Hanmer, and O'Donnell, the squadron was down to 7 officers, 27 enlisted men, and 7 serviceable OY-1s.

In May the squadron's operations shifted to the southern portion of the island when the landing force commander ordered III AC to swing south in order to permit a two corps abreast assault on the stiff Japanese defenses along the Shuri-Naha line.





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 123727

In addition to acting as the "eyes of the artillery", the squadron was also important because of the medical evacuation services it carried out.

The squadron's aircraft situation continued to grow worse when Second Lieutenants Lester E. Bartels and James L. Morris were forced down due to aircraft engine failures. Both pilots were rescued but their aircraft were lost.

The OYs were grounded on 25 May in order to give engine factory representatives and squadron maintenance personnel an opportunity to determine the cause of the failures. Finally, one of the squadron's maintenance men found the problem. Lint from Chamois cloth being used to filter fuel during refueling operations had been clogging the aircraft carburetors. By 7 June all the carburetors had been cleaned, and the squadron was able to resume flight operations.

In June VMO-6 also began making medical evacuation flights. During one two-day period, 17-18 June, the squadron had only three aircraft flying, but managed to evacuate 94 wounded besides maintaining other normal combat support flights. For their work in carrying out these medical evacuations, many of which occurred during the hours of darkness, VMO-6 received a letter of commendation from the Commanding General, III Amphibious Corps.

The spotting mission, at least in the view of the artillery commanders, was the squadron's most

valuable contribution. The importance of this mission was best described by the III AC Artillery G-3, Colonel Frederick P. Henderson. He wrote:

If there was any group of indispensable officers in III AC Artillery on Okinawa, it was our air spotters. The nature of the terrain in southern Okinawa seriously limited ground observation—especially while we were fighting our way uphill on the Shuri massif. Without our AOs [Aerial Observers], III AC Artillery would have been blind.²¹

Colonel Henderson also noted that the Japanese recognized their best defense against the threat posed by VMO artillery direction was concealment. Thus, by lengthening the operating hours of the observation squadrons to the extent that their missions commenced with launches before daylight and ended with landings after dark, the VMOs were able to provide an extremely cheap form of suppression and interdiction.²²

The primacy of the squadron's artillery spotting mission and its operational attachment to ground organizations made it somewhat akin to an "orphan" with regard to the supply support it received from its parent aviation headquarters. It lived and fought with ground units, and it had little or no connection with what the rest of Marine aviation was doing. As a result, III AC Artillery and the divisional artillery regiment (15th Marines) provided the squadron with most of its non-aviation peculiar supply support. The squadron also learned to adapt to its status by becoming skillful in the art of "scrounging"²³

During the Okinawa campaign squadron aircraft sustained substantial antiaircraft and small arms fire, but battle damage, as well as the normal mechanical difficulties associated with flight operations, were overcome by maintenance crews working long, hard hours. The squadron, while flying a total of 460 combat missions and evacuating 195 seriously wounded men, compiled an impressive 904 flight hours.²⁴

With the end of the battle, VMO-6 began packing its equipment and crating its aircraft to board shipping for another campaign. On 6 July all personnel and equipment boarded the attack transport USS *Bollinger* (APA 234) and two days later sailed for Guam in the Marianas. They arrived on 14 July and were assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 21, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, on 25 July 1945.

With the capitulation of the Japanese in September, the squadron underwent an unusually

²¹To conduct night operations trucks were used to light the runways for take-offs and landings.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332834

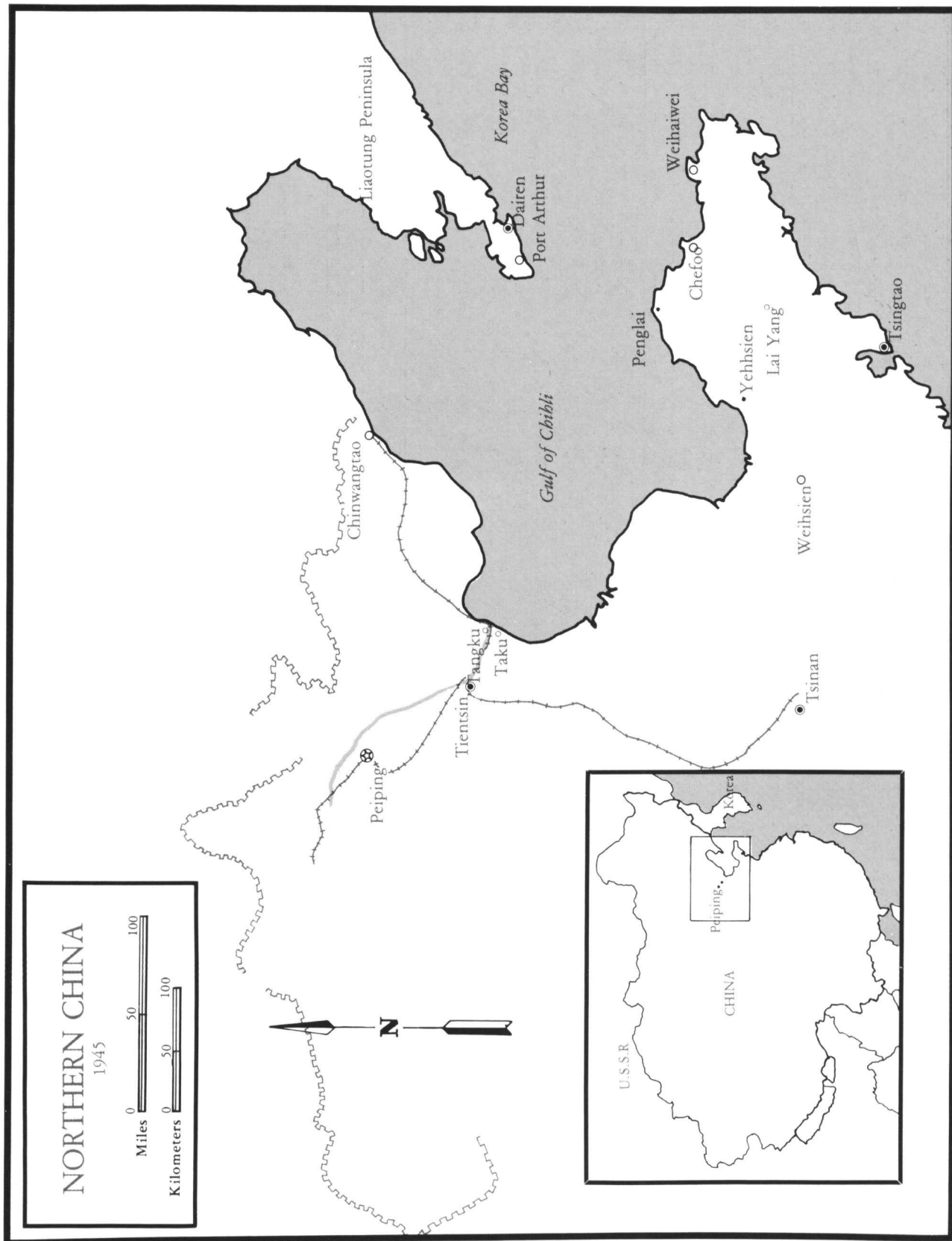
With the Okinawa campaign behind them, squadron personnel posed for this group photograph on Guam in July 1945. By October, VMO-6 was serving in Tsingtao, China.

large turnover of personnel. The majority of the original officers and men who had left the United States with the squadron in January 1945, returned home for reassignment. Among them was Captain Donald R. Garrett, VMO-6's commanding officer, who had been relieved by Captain Joe W. Fitts, Jr. on 16 September.

A gradual migration from Guam by VMO-6 personnel started on 24 September 1945, when 13 officers and three enlisted men departed on board the escort carrier USS *Bougainville* (CVE 100) for Okinawa. Three days later, 31 enlisted men, with squadron equipment, under the command of First Lieutenant Robert C. Gutknecht, boarded the transport USS *Anne Arundel* (AP 76) and left Guam on 2 October. The officers and enlisted men on board the *Bougainville* arrived at Okinawa on 27 September, but departed the next day to evade a typhoon. On 2 October, after the typhoon had passed, the *Bougainville* returned to Okinawa. Five days later these officers and men once again left Okinawa, finally reaching their destination, Tsingtao, China, on 11 October. The remainder of the squadron, on board the *Anne Arundel*, joined them the same day. On 12 October 1945, the squadron flew its aircraft off the *Bougainville* and landed at Tsingtao Airport, its new home. The Marines on board the *Anne Arundel* began unloading the squadron's equipment and transporting it to Tsingtao.

VMO-6 now had 14 officers and 34 enlisted men. Its primary duty consisted of flying patrol missions from Tsingtao to Lai-Yang, Wei-Hsien, and Po-li-Chen to report troop movements of the Chinese Communists; it also performed rescue missions when necessary. On 13 October, Second Lieutenant Wayne Morse and Second Lieutenant James L Morris rescued a Navy pilot from the aircraft carrier USS *Boxer* (CVS 21), who had been forced down about 50 miles north of Tsingtao. The squadron also assisted in salvaging the Navy airplane. On 20 October, VMO-6 was reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Several days later, Morse and Morris picked up an injured pilot and gunner of a SB2C Helldiver which had crashed about one mile from the airfield after take-off, and returned them to the airfield for medical treatment.

The squadron continued to observe and report the activities of the Chinese armies for the next seven months. In May 1946 VMO-6 received verbal orders to prepare for transfer to the United States. On 4 May the squadron was transferred to MAG-25, but on 10 May it was reassigned to MAG-32. Because of the increased activities of the Chinese Communist Army, VMO-6 was ordered to remain in China indefinitely. On 18 May, the squadron was again transferred to MAG-25 for administrative purposes, but came under the operational control of the 3d Marine Brigade. The squadron was now commanded



by Captain Richard B. Cropley who relieved Captain Edward S. John. John had taken over the squadron on 15 December 1945 from Captain Fitts. Another change occurred on 1 June when the squadron was transferred administratively from MAG-25 to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, but with operational control remaining with the 3d Marine Brigade.

By May 1946, VMO-6 pilots were consistently taking small arms fire on their observation and patrol flights from Communist troops. The squadron maintained 11 OY-1 aircraft, but four were out of operation because of a shortage of aircraft parts.

On 11 July VMO-6 was given an emergency mission of evacuating Communication Group Team 21 of Executive Headquarters, Peiping, China, consisting of two Army officers, a civilian interpreter, and four enlisted men. The team was stationed at Kaomi, Shantung Province, approximately 65 miles west of Tsingtao, and, because of the Chinese Communists' advances, had been completely cut off from all but radio communication with its supply point at Tsingtao. Marine aircraft from Tsingtao succeeded in bringing the team vital supplies, but these flights could not be conducted safely because of inadequate landing facilities at Kaomi. Evacuation of the team by truck convoy was precluded because of destroyed bridges and unfordable rivers, and it was decided to use small planes to lift out the team members and their light equipment.

VMO-6 was assigned the mission. Landing at a small athletic field, the squadron made 17 lifts into Kaomi over a period of seven hours, and successfully evacuated the team. In a letter of appreciation, the chairman of the team, Army Colonel Phillip C. Wilders, stated that the VMO-6 pilots, "... displayed coolness, judgement, and flying skill beyond that normally to be expected."

After the evacuation of Team 21 the Communist offensive subsided in the Tsingtao area and the need for observation patrols diminished to the point where the squadron was flying only two missions per week. On 15 October 1946, VMO-6 moved to Marine Air Base One, Tientsin, China, and on 13 December the squadron ceased all flight operations in preparation for departure to the United States. Captain Harold F. Brown assumed the post of commanding officer on 13 December.

The squadron was transferred on 20 December to the 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), FMF. On 3 January 1947, VMO-6 boarded the attack transport USS *Chilton* (APA 38) and left for home, arriving at San Diego, California, on 22 January.

The squadron was stationed at the airstrip at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, California, and was reassigned to Marine Air, West Coast.

In the spring of 1947, VMO-6 received the additional duty of working with Post Malaria Control at Camp Pendleton, and one plane began spraying DDT on all mosquito-infested areas in the camp. The unsafe areas were sprayed twice weekly during spring, summer, and fall months. On 15 July 1947, First Lieutenant Albert C. Beneke was killed when his aircraft crashed and burned in Sandia Canyon near Fallbrook, California, during a DDT spraying mission. Memorial services were held at Camp Pendleton on 18 July.

Operational control of VMO-6 was transferred, on 16 July, to the 1st Marine Division. The division had just arrived at Camp Pendleton and very few field problems, involving VMO-6, were conducted until the division had a chance to adjust to its new home. On 1 October, the squadron's designation changed from VMO-6, Marine Air, West Coast to VMO-6, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force.

The spray flights were interrupted during the first week of November when the fabric of the spray plane became saturated with DDT. The plane was grounded until new fabric was installed. During 13-14 November, VMO-6 worked in conjunction with the 1st Marine Division on Operation Penny, which consisted of a landing on Alliso Canyon Beach and a drive inland to the airstrip at Camp Pendleton. The OY-type airplanes, flown by VMO-6, were used as observation planes spotting the movements of enemy forces. On 10 February 1948, VMO-6 participated in the 1st Marine Division Operation 1-48. During the evening of the 10th, VMO-6 was called upon to search for five amphibian tractors which had been swamped while attempting an emergency landing in the surf at Oceanside. Keeping two planes constantly in the air throughout the day, the squadron found four of the five lost tractors.

On 29 March, an OY was specially rigged for spraying DDT and the regular spraying flights were resumed. Captain Richard B. Cropley began his third tour of duty in VMO-6 as the commanding officer when he relieved Captain Brown on 17 June 1948. The primary duties of VMO-6 continued to be artillery spotting, aerial photography, camouflage study, and message drops and pickups. Administrative missions also increased as the squadron began flying 1st Marine Division officer and enlisted

personnel on official business to areas within the Eleventh Naval District in an effort to save time.

Again on 19 July 1948, the DDT spraying of Camp Pendleton was suspended when the spray plane sustained a damaged wing tip and rudder due to flying into a cable. The pilot was uninjured and made a safe landing. From July to September the squadron was occupied mostly with administrative flights, transportation of personnel, and artillery spotting.

On 1 October 1948, VMO-6 left in two echelons to participate in an amphibious exercise along the southern California coast. The ground echelon departed for Seal Beach, California, and boarded the tank landing ship (LST) 1146. The flight echelon left for Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, and hoisted its planes on board the USS *Boxer* (CV 21). The squadron's planes were to be launched on 8 October in support of the amphibious landing, but heavy fog prevented the scheduled launch and the *Boxer* returned to San Diego. The aircraft were then unloaded and flown to a small emergency airstrip near the beachhead on 9 October. Meanwhile, the ground echelon had off-loaded from the LST and was waiting when the aircraft and their crews finally arrived. Operational flights in support of the exercise began immediately and observers from the 1st Marine Division were flown to observe and report the frontline activities and direct simulated artillery fire. The operation ended on 10 October and the squadron returned to Camp Pendleton to resume its normal operations. On 20 October, Major Robert G. Howie replaced Captain Cropley as the commanding officer.

Two officers, five enlisted men, and two aircraft from VMO-6 took part in Operation Micowex 49-A held in Kodiak, Alaska, during the period 8-14 February 1949. A total of 21 hours were flown by the two aircraft under cold weather conditions. On 14 February Captain William C. Benton and First Lieutenant Edward P. Stamford took off from Kodiak, Alaska, in two OY aircraft and landed on board the *Boxer* while it was anchored in the harbor. This is believed to be the first time that an OY type aircraft had landed on an aircraft carrier. The small detachment returned home on 5 March 1949.

During the next several months VMO-6 worked with the 1st Marine Division on several field problems in which it practiced radio communication and flew camouflage detection flights; it also controlled simulated air strikes and spotted for the ar-

tillery. The squadron also continued its DDT spraying of the infested areas of Camp Pendleton.

Korea and the Advent of Helicopters

The prospect of peace for America was shattered on 25 June 1950, when seven infantry divisions and an armored division of the North Korean People's Army invaded the Republic of Korea. Although the U.S. had no treaty obligation to help defend the Republic of Korea, there were many moral and pragmatic reasons to do so. Equally as important, the United Nations, in a series of Security Council meetings, called for a collective effort to support the Republic of Korea against the North Korean aggression.*

The United States began providing military support to South Korea on 30 June 1950, when President Harry S. Truman authorized the Commander in Chief, Far East (CinCFE), General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, to use American forces to oppose any further North Korean advances.²⁷

Anticipating the use of Marines in the rapidly deteriorating Korean situation, units in the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were given warning orders to prepare for movement overseas. Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California, became hubs of pre-deployment activity. Major Vincent J. Gottschalk, who had assumed command of VMO-6 on 3 July, was ordered to prepare a detachment of four officers and 10 enlisted men for deployment. The squadron was busily engaged in outfitting the detachment when the order was changed to include the whole unit.

*The United States' involvement in Korea was a result of the political vacuum created by the defeat of Japan in World War II. As early as the Cairo Conference of 1943 the United States had supported the concept of a free and independent Korea, and at the Yalta Conference in 1945 Russia informally agreed to the idea. After the Japanese surrender, the United States and Russia jointly occupied Korea, with the 38th parallel serving as a temporary demarcation line. The joint occupation was supposed to offer the Koreans a period of transition during which they could develop the skills and experience necessary for self-government. It soon became apparent, however, that Russia was opposed to a united, independent Korea. The 38th Parallel became a political boundary. In 1948 U.S. trusteeship in Korea ended when a national assembly, elected under United Nations supervision, established the Republic of Korea. Russia refused to participate in the elections, and that portion of Korea under her occupation was formed into a separate, Communist state, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea.²⁶

On 7 July 1950, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was activated in response to General MacArthur's request for the immediate dispatch of a Marine regimental combat team with supporting air. The brigade was built around the reinforced 5th Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 33. Brigadier General Edward A. Craig was designated the brigade commander.

In task organizing for the new air-ground team, operational control of VMO-6 was passed from the 1st Marine Division to the brigade, while administrative control and logistic support of the squadron became the responsibility of MAG-33.

Preparations for operations in Korea were also under way on the east coast. Headquarters Marine Corps ordered Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 (HMX-1), located at Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Virginia, to detach eight officers and 30 enlisted men to El Toro, for service with the brigade.²⁸ This was the first permanent assignment of helicopter qualified pilots and maintenance personnel to the Fleet Marine Force.*

Upon arrival in California, most members of the HMX-1 cadre were assigned to VMO-6. Captain Victor A. Armstrong, the detachment's senior officer, was made the squadron executive officer.**

VMO-6's personnel strength had expanded to 10 officers and 64 enlisted men with the augmentation of the HMX-1 personnel, however, the acquisition of aircraft and spare parts remained a problem. Major Gottschalk's solution to the problem of having four serviceable OYs was to take along eight OYs with a view to using four of them for parts when needed.²⁹ Meanwhile, because HMX-1 had only transferred personnel, the squadron had to acquire helicopters from sources on the west coast. Within the week, with the cooperation of naval authorities, they had picked up six Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopters: two each from the Inyokern and Point Mugu naval airbases, and two from the overhaul and repair facility in San Diego. Further, almost all the HO3S-1 spare parts on the east coast were placed on priority requisition for delivery before the scheduled sailing date.³⁰

The HO3S-1 was a four-seat, observation-utility helicopter built by Sikorsky, with a three-bladed main rotor system which was powered by a



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A4468

The Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopter performed yeoman service for VMO-6 in Korea. Note the makeshift manner in which a litter patient had to be carried in the aircraft's passenger compartment.

450-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp Jr., nine-cylinder, radial-cooled engine. It could carry 1,250 pounds and cruise at 85 miles per hour. The pilot sat in the front center and a bench-style seat aft of the pilot accommodated three passengers.³¹ Despite its observation designation, the HO3S-1 was used for a variety of roles. It was not, however, well suited for what may have been its most important mission, medical evacuation.*** Additionally, it lacked instrumentation and lighting for night flying.

On 13 July, four OYs were flown from Camp Pendleton to North Island Naval Air Station near San Diego, where they and the helicopters were hoisted on board the escort carrier USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116). The remainder of the squadron personnel and its equipment also embarked on the 13th. At 1000 the next day, the *Badoeng Strait*, overloaded with aircraft and personnel, sailed from San Diego. While at sea, a VMO-6 helicopter supported the task force by delivering guard mail and passengers from ship to ship. The commanding officer of the *Badoeng Strait* found additional missions for the VMO-6 helicopter and soon it was exchanging movie films regularly and carrying a chaplain from ship to ship for divine services.

The *Badoeng Strait* docked at Kobe, Japan, at 2000 on 31 July. The OY aircraft were unloaded by hoist, but the helicopters remained on board over-

* Appendix F provides a list of these pioneering Marines.

**Captain Victor A. Armstrong attained the rank of major general.

***In order to carry a non-ambulatory patient in the HO3S-1, due to its interior configuration, the rear right hand window had to be removed and the stretcher case loaded head first through the window and across the passenger compartment. During the flight the patients' feet remained outside the helicopter.³²

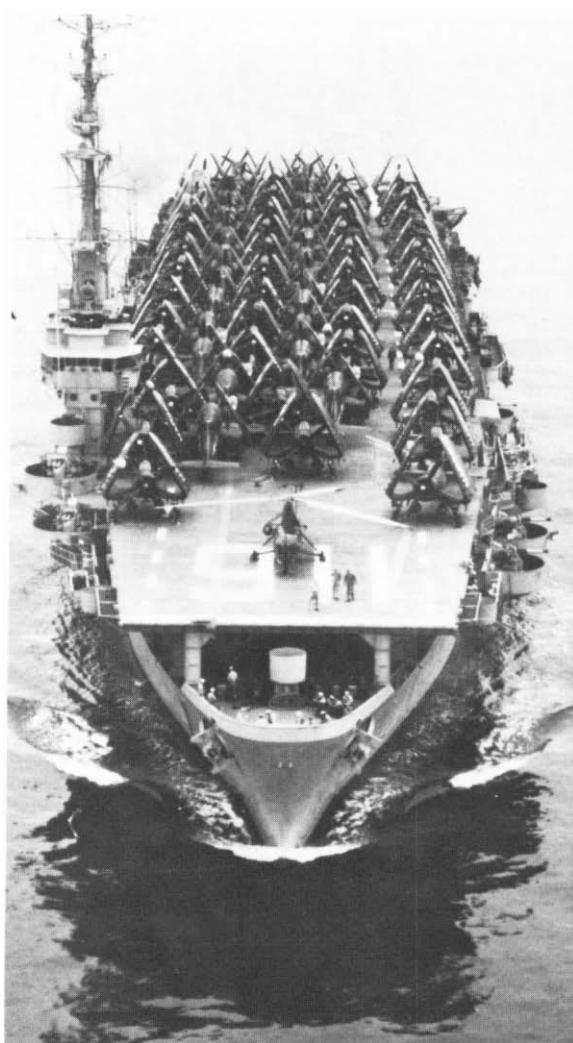
night. The next morning the helicopters were flown off the carrier to a nearby vacant lot where they underwent thorough maintenance inspections. Meanwhile, the OYs took off from a narrow street and flew to Itami, Japan, and from there to Ashiya, Japan. After the completion of their inspections, the slower helicopters took off and proceeded to Itami, and from there to Iwakuni, Japan, where they stayed overnight.* The squadron's rear echelon remained behind to assemble the equipment and later boarded a Japanese LST for Pusan, Korea.

The helicopter and OY sections temporarily rejoined in Ashiya on 2 August. At Ashiya a joint briefing was received, and after the briefing the aircrews regrouped into helicopter and OY flights, taking off for Pusan the same day. Upon arrival in Korea the forward echelon was billeted in a Korean school house with Army and Air Force personnel near an airstrip 10 miles west of Pusan.

On 3 August the squadron went to work in Korea by supporting the 1st Brigade's move to Chang-won. The OYs flew convoy escort, artillery spotting, observation, and reconnaissance flights. The helicopters were used for medical evacuation, search and rescue, reconnaissance, and command and control missions. The latter mission was particularly important during those first hectic weeks in Korea because it permitted the brigade commander to make rapid, first hand appraisals of the tactical situation, and to conduct spot conferences with his subordinate commanders.

On 4 August the rear echelon arrived in Pusan and the next day the squadron's supplies and equipment were loaded on a train and moved to Chinhae, a small grass field also used by the Korean Air Force. The remainder of the squadron moved from Pusan to Chinhae on 6 August. The sixth also marked the date of the squadron's first aircraft loss when Master Sergeant Herbert J. Valentine did not return to Chinhae after a mission in an OY aircraft. An extensive search failed to locate either him or his aircraft, but the next day he returned to base. His plane had been shot down over the water and he had been rescued by friendly Koreans.

Resupply operations became an increasingly important support function of the squadron. The mountainous terrain and extreme heat caused the troops to collapse from heat exhaustion if not sup-



National Archives and Record Service Photo 80G416920

VMO-6 departed for combat operations in Korea aboard an overcrowded USS Badoeng Strait on 14 July 1950. The accompanying pack of F4U Corsairs were from VMF-214, VMF-323, and VMF(N)-513.

plied with sufficient water, and supply bearers took hours carrying water and food to the mountain heights. The helicopters and OYs delivered these same supplies in a matter of minutes. Bomb racks were attached to OY wing struts, allowing them to carry five-gallon water cans or rations. The HO3S-1s required no modifications for the mission.

On 8 August, the squadron recorded its first night evacuation. VMO-6 helicopters had already transported six seriously wounded Marines from Chindong-ni to the naval hospital train at Masan, when another emergency evacuation request was received at dusk. Disregarding the night flying

*Two of the squadron's six helicopters as well as two pilots were left at Itami for use by MAG-33/1st MAW (Forward).

limitations of the HO3S-1, Captain Armstrong made the first of more than a thousand night evacuations carried out by the squadron in Korea.

The squadron's helicopter crews continued to be kept busy evacuating wounded Marines from the mountains and rescuing downed pilots. On 10 August, Captain Vivian M. Moses, a VMF-323 fighter pilot flying off the *Badoeng Strait* was shot down and made a forced landing in the water. He was rescued by one of VMO-6's helicopters and remained overnight with the squadron at Chinhae. The next day he returned to his squadron by helicopter. He was killed within a few hours of his return while on another combat mission. A VMO-6 crew recovered Captain Moses' body before the helicopter which had taken him to the *Badoeng Strait* had returned to Chinhae.

On 15 August 1950, the squadron received the two helicopters and two pilots they had previously left with MAG-33 in Japan. The newcomers arrived in time to participate in the first battle of the Naktong River bulge on 17 August. During the battle the helicopters and OYs coordinated on another new mission for the squadron, psychological warfare.

Helicopters transported surrender leaflets to the squadron command post from the rear area, while OYs made aerial delivery of them to the enemy.

On 26 August an OY crashed on a spotting mission over the front lines and the pilot, First Lieutenant Harold J. Davis, was seriously injured. His observer, Second Lieutenant Patrick G. Sivert, sustained less serious injuries. Two helicopters were dispatched to the area, which was under counter-battery fire, to bring them out. The helicopters successfully extracted the injured pilot and his observer and delivered them to the hospital train at Masan. Two days later Davis and Sivert were evacuated to a hospital ship at Pusan. Davis died from his injuries on 6 September.

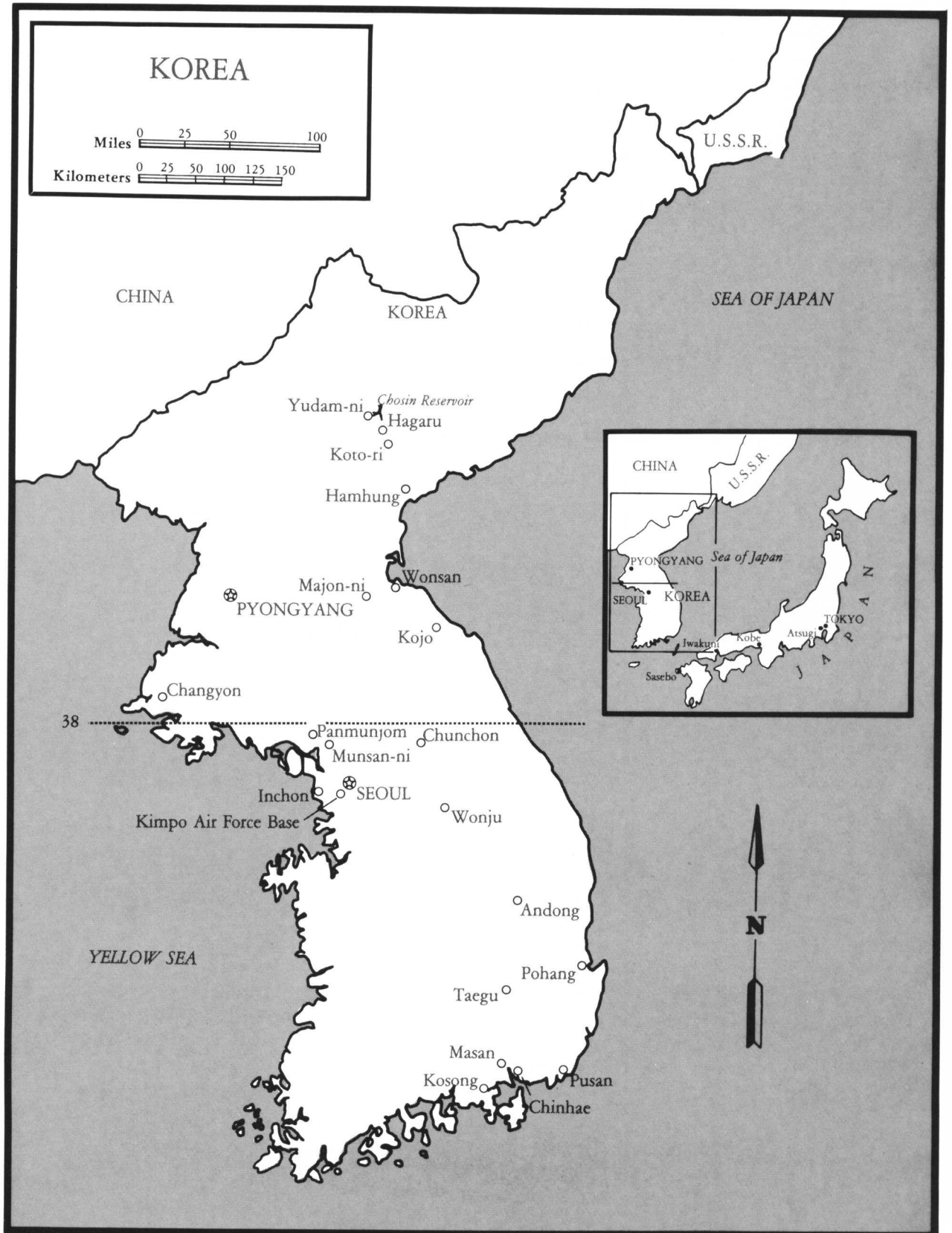
On 9 September 1950, operational control of VMO-6 was transferred from the 1st Brigade to the 1st Marine Division (Reinforced), itself a part of the X Army Corps.

The squadron was scheduled to take part in the Inchon Landing, and because of a scarcity of shipping space the squadron had to be split into two echelons. On 9 September, 10 officers, 48 enlisted men, and 4 helicopters were loaded on board LST Q079 at

Flying above the rugged Korean terrain an OY-1 piloted by Maj Vincent J. Gottschalk carries out a spotting mission. Maj Gottschalk commanded VMO-6 during 1950-51.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A130913





Chinhae, and left for Pusan harbor.* Four officers and 43 enlisted men along with the remainder of the squadron property delayed at Chinhae waiting for follow-on shipping. The forward echelon arrived at Pusan on 10 September and two additional OY aircraft were loaded on board the LST. Additionally, the escort carriers USS *Sicily* (CVE 118) and USS *Badoeng Strait*, were used to transport one OY apiece. After this final bit of loading was completed the task force left Pusan for Inchon.

After the securing of Wolmi-do Island, the assault on Inchon began in earnest in the early evening of 15 September. Flights were not required from VMO-6 during the initial landings at Inchon, but on D + 1 the LST-based helicopters flew reconnaissance missions over Wolmi-do Island. Late in the day a VMO-6 helicopter, piloted by First Lieutenant Max Nebergall, rescued a Navy Corsair pilot downed in Inchon harbor. Routine observation missions were flown by the carrier-based OYs, while rescue, liaison, and evacuation missions were flown by the helicopters. From 16 to 20 September 1950, the squadron command post and its dirt road landing strip were located in the 1st Marine Division headquarters area at Inchon. One squadron OY was destroyed on 18 September while landing at dusk, when the aircraft collided with power lines strung across a road near the approach to the landing strip. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries.

The 1st Marine Division continued to push inland toward Kimpo Airfield and on 18 September, the first landing at Kimpo, the largest airfield in Korea at the time, was made by Captain Armstrong in a VMO-6 helicopter. Captain Armstrong carried Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commanding General, FMFPac, as his passenger. Two days later VMO-6 moved to Kimpo for operations.

As the enemy was pushed closer to the Han River, resistance stiffened. On 21 September Second Lieutenant Edgar F. Gaudette Jr. and his air observer, Captain Robert E. McClean, parachuted to safety west of Yongdong-Po-Ri after their OY

airplane was shot down by enemy small arms fire. Both Marines received minor injuries. On the same day an HO3S-1 helicopter piloted by First Lieutenant Arthur R. Bancroft was destroyed during an attempt to rescue a downed fighter pilot behind enemy lines.** First Lieutenant Robert A. Longstaff, in another squadron helicopter, later rescued Bancroft, his crew chief, and the fighter pilot. Two days later Captain Armstrong rescued a pilot who had gone down over a hundred miles behind enemy lines.

On 25 September 1950, a VMO-6 helicopter effected a rescue in record-breaking time. A Marine pilot and radar operator of VMF(N)-542 had been downed in a rice paddy 5 miles north of Kimpo.*** The rescue operation, from time of notification until completion, took only 6 minutes.

A more significant action took place that night. A Seventh Fleet helicopter on "loan" to VMO-6 had suffered battle damage while on a deep rescue mission. Unable to make it back to Kimpo, the crew made a precautionary landing in the Han River a few miles out of Seoul. Word was received at the squadron around 2100 that the crew was down in enemy territory, and Captain Armstrong launched to recover them.

Although the HO3S-1 had no landing light, he was able to spot the downed aircraft because of the illumination provided by the burning city of Seoul. Then because he could not use his hoist, he landed his helicopter on a sandbar close to the damaged aircraft. The two crewmen, a Navy ensign and a Marine corporal, swam to the rescuing helicopter and were safely delivered back to base.³⁴

On 26 September, the squadron's rear echelon finally arrived at Inchon. It was a welcome addition. With the enemy retreating from Seoul, targets were readily available and large numbers of enemy troops and equipment were destroyed through air strikes and artillery missions directed by VMO-6 aerial observers. The hard-pressed enemy stiffened his air defense around the city of Seoul with heavier anti-aircraft weapons, and VMO-6's slow moving aircraft

*This LST was contracted from the Japanese, and manned entirely by a Japanese crew. The VMO-6 personnel shared the ship's messing facilities with the crew—many of whom had been members of the Japanese imperial navy only five years earlier. Other aspects of the unusual arrangement included the facts that the Marines had no armament on board nor any communication facilities with the American forces. Fortunately, Captain Armstrong, the detachment officer in charge, spoke fluent Japanese due to his fifteen year residence in Japan prior to World War II.³³

**Bancroft's crew chief had been unable to drag the downed pilot back to the HO3S-1, so Bancroft had to leave the running helicopter to assist. While the crew was away from the aircraft, the helicopter's collective friction device worked loose and the helicopter rolled onto its side.

***The pilot of the VMF(N)-542 aircraft was the squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Max J. Volcansek, Jr.

became lucrative targets. On 29 September, the squadron lost an OY aircraft and a HO3S-1 helicopter. The OY was shot down 5 miles north of Seoul, killing the aerial observer, Captain Edwin E. Rives. First Lieutenant Arthur R. Bancroft was dispatched in a helicopter to rescue the pilot, Second Lieutenant Thomas D. Odenbaugh, but Bancroft's HO3S-1 was also shot down by enemy antiaircraft fire. Bancroft was killed in the crash, and Odenbaugh was declared missing in action on 29 September 1950.*

VMO-6 continued supporting the 1st Division in its drive north of Seoul. On 3 October First Lieutenant Lloyd J. Engelhardt made a rescue of a downed pilot, Captain Wilbur D. Wilcox of VMF-312, in the vicinity of Chun-chon. On the same day Captain Armstrong flew General Clifton B. Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps, on an inspection tour of the Kimpo-Seoul area. Two days later Engelhardt made another successful rescue, this time an Air Force pilot, near Sibyon-ni.

Acting on a verbal warning order from Major James N. Cupp, Division Air Officer, preparation was started for the embarkation of a surface echelon of VMO-6 to accompany the division on its next operation. One week later the squadron loaded four officers and 70 enlisted men on board LST-1123 and left the next day for Wonsan, Korea. A flight echelon of 17 officers, 19 enlisted men, and most of the squadron's spare parts and tools remained at Kimpo.

On 21 October the squadron responded to an emergency call from the Fifth Air Force. Assistance was needed in evacuating wounded personnel of the Army's 187th Airborne Regiment in the Sukchon area. One HO3S-1, flown by Captain Gene "W" Morrison, and three OYs, flown by Captain Roy L. Thomas and First Lieutenants Arthur W. Poehlman and Robert W. Taylor, were sent to help. Captain Morrison evacuated eight wounded and the OY pilots evacuated a total of five. Rescuing downed pilots continued to be a big part of VMO-6's business; on 24 October Captain Wallace D. Blatt and First Lieutenant Charles C. Ward rescued two Air Force pilots. Blatt picked up Second Lieutenant



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332833

Squadron helicopter pilots conduct a planeside mission brief at Kimpo, October 1950. Pictured left to right are: 1stLt Gustave F. Lueddeke; Capt Victor A. Armstrong; 1stLt Lloyd J. Englehardt; 1stLt Robert A. Longstaff; and Capt George B. Farish.

Thomas J. Pointeck, and Ward rescued First Lieutenant Edwin Thomas. The two pilots had been shot down at Koto-ri, 75 miles north of Wonsan. Three days later Blatt had to travel 116 miles north of Wonsan to pick up Marine Captain Frank K. Reilly Jr., a VMF-312 fighter pilot, who had been shot down by enemy small arms fire. Corporal Edwin F. Lester assisted Captain Blatt on the rescue.

On 25 October the squadron's surface echelon landed at Wonsan. Three days later the flight echelon flew in and immediately the helicopters were put to work evacuating wounded Marines of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines from Kojo, Korea.** VMO-6 operated from Wonsan until the evening of 3 November when it moved to Yonpo Airfield and began supporting the 1st Marine Division in its advance to the Chosin Reservoir.

*The squadron believed that Second Lieutenant Odenbaugh was taken captive but there was never any confirmation by the enemy of his capture, and he was officially listed as missing in action on 29 September 1950. His remains were never found, and he was declared killed in action on 2 December 1953.

**Colonel Gene "W" Morrison recalled that when he landed at Wonsan after the ferry flight from Kimpo he did not even shut his helicopter down. Instead, he received a cockpit briefing and immediately took off for Kojo."



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332832

Without the work of the maintenance personnel the mission could not be accomplished. The upper photographs depict unidentified Marines carrying out maintenance activities at "home" and in the field. The lower left photograph shows, left to right, SSgt Paul W. Fulcher, Capt Robert E. McCluen, and Sgt Herman F. Petruck. The enlisted Marines invented the metal blood holder displayed in the photograph, and Capt McCluen was the first to use it in an actual medical evacuation. The lower right photograph shows Sgt Sherris W. Robinson, unmindful of the snowfall, performing his duties.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 159459



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo 156880

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A133585



Cold weather arrived suddenly while the squadron was at Yonpo, and its effects were quickly noted. On the first morning after the drop in temperature, Captain Eugene J. Pope made the initial helicopter launch of the day. Within four or five minutes after take off he returned to base, making a sloppy landing away from the flight line in the snow. His cyclic and collective controls had been so stiff he had nearly crashed.³⁶

As a remedy for the cold weather, lighter greases and oils were used, and when possible all aircraft were hangared at night. It was also necessary to shorten flights for OY pilots and observers to prevent frostbite.

As a tribute to the maintenance crews of VMO-6 the historical diary for October 1950 states:

The foregoing daily resume of the activities of this squadron indicate the operational work accomplished by the pilots, observers, and aircraft of this squadron but does not completely cover the efforts of the ground crews that so successfully maintained the aircraft. Without this work by the aircraft mechanics, such operation could not be accomplished.³⁷

A final key ingredient of VMO-6's excellent maintenance effort was due to the expertise and hard work provided by the Sikorsky technical representative, Mr. Harold Nachlin. It was claimed by many in the squadron that without him it would have been impossible to keep the HO3S-1s flying.³⁸

The mess crews were likewise mentioned:

Besides operational accomplishments, note must be made of the excellent messing which was provided this squadron by the three cooks and one mess supply sergeant assigned. Though hampered by many moves from one area to another, whether by ship, vehicle, or plane, the mess personnel never failed within an hour and one-half to arrange a palatable hot meal for the squadron personnel. Not only should the food and the excellent preparation of it be mentioned but arrangements were always rapidly made to comfortably house the personnel as they ate. Tables and benches were found or constructed and suitable cleaning facilities were always ready. NCOinC of this ingenious mess crew during this squadron's operation from August until present date is TSgt C. P. Witt, USMC.³⁹

Normal flight operations continued until 28 November when the 1st Marine Division became engaged in heavy fighting in the Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni areas. The Chinese Communists had entered the war in force and Marines were strung out from Hungnam to the Chosin Reservoir. During the epic breakout from the Chosin Reservoir by the 1st Division, VMO-6 OYs flew spotting missions and directed fire on enemy concentrations and

roadblocks, while squadron helicopters were busily engaged flying medical evacuations and rescuing downed pilots from behind enemy lines.

All flyable aircraft were put into the air; an extract from VMO-6's November 1950 historical diary shows the concentrated effort:

28 November 1950

Operations increased sharply as the Division became engaged in heavy fighting in the Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni area. Crews for both helicopters and OYs were flown to the strip at Hagaru-ri and operations were conducted from that point, thus saving much time in accomplishing missions. All available aircraft flew from dawn to dusk.

Captain G. B. Farish's helicopter was hit by small arms fire while on a resupply mission to Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines near Sinhung-ni. The aircraft was flown to Hagaru-ri strip and left AOG [Aircraft Operationally Grounded] for main rotor transmission which was damaged.

Captain A. F. McCaleb, Jr. directed seven airstrikes from his OY.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY	
Reconnaissance	21
Transportation	7

HO3S-1	
Reconnaissance	1
Transportation	16
Evacuation	23

Total flights 68.	Total flight time 73.7.
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Results of operations are as follows: Fifty casualties evacuated; directed seven airstrikes; conducted two fire missions; located twenty-nine road blocks; located large groups of enemy; estimated 370 enemy troops killed.

29 November 1950

Operations remained at a high level. 1stLt Engelhardt's helicopter was hit by small arms fire while attempting to evacuate a casualty from Sinhung-ni area. The aircraft was returned to the base for repairs.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY	
Reconnaissance	14
Transportation	5

HO3S-1	
Evacuation	21
Transportation	14

Total flights 54.	Total flight time 61.8.
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Results of operations are as follows: Directed twelve airstrikes; conducted three fire missions; covered one motorized convoy and four combat patrols; located six groups of enemy (up to 200 in each group) and three enemy battalions; evacuated 44 casualties. One machine gun destroyed and fifty enemy troops killed.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A158626

Capt Alfred F. McCaleb made use of a "borrowed" Grumman TBM to fly medical evacuees out of Koto-ri during the division's breakout from Yudam-ni.

30 November 1950

Helicopters again performed evacuations and resupply missions from Yudam-ni to Hagaru-ri carrying medical supplies, gas, radio equipment, and tank parts in and casualties out.

All OYs in commission flew today. Lt Taylor, pilot, and Capt Morton, observer, had their OY hit by small arms fire. The plane was safely landed at Hagatu-ri strip.

Flights conducted consisted of the following:

OY	
Reconnaissance	7
Transportation	10
Artillery Spotting	3

HO3S-1	
Evacuation	18
Transportation	6
Utility	1

Total flights 56.

Total flight time 58.7.

Results of operations are as follows: Covered five patrols; located fourteen road blocks and fifteen groups of enemy up to 250 in size; led eight airstrikes; evacuated fifty casualties; conducted three fire missions; observed results of one air drop.

Monthly totals:

Total flights OY	473.
Total flight time OY	707.4.
Total flights HO3S-1	571.
Total flight time HO3S-1	402.4. ⁴⁰

During the Marines' movement to Hungnam the need for more medical evacuation flights became acute. In order to help meet this need a VMO-6 officer, Captain Alfred F. McCaleb, was one of a handful of pilots to fly TBM aircraft borrowed from Navy

and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing flight lines, to evacuate the injured.* In another effort to save valuable time, crews and aircraft conducted operations directly from the Hagaru airstrip.

Although excellent observation and casualty evacuation was provided by VMO-6 during the Chosin breakout, the most important contribution provided by the squadron may have been the psychological boost the helicopters and OYs provided to units separated by enemy action. During the most critical period of the breakout they provided the only physical contact the separated units had with other Marines.

On 3 December First Lieutenant Robert A. Longstaff was shot down and killed by enemy small arms fire while he was attempting to evacuate a seriously wounded Marine near Shinhung-ni. A patrol sent out from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines recovered his body. On 10 December, as elements of the division began to leave Koto-ri, VMO-6 received verbal orders to prepare for embarkation on board ship. The next day, First Lieutenant Roy Sheil, an observer, and First Lieutenant Adolorde G. Morency, the OY pilot, crashed while they were making a message drop to elements of the withdrawing convoy near Sudong. Their plane struck high wires, went in-

*The TBM "Avenger" was a single-engine, torpedo-bomber built by General Motors under license from the Grumman Aircraft Corporation. It could carry several litter patients and as many as nine ambulatory cases.

to a flat spin, and crashed to the canyon floor. Both the pilot and the observer were picked up by an Army unit and rushed to a hospital in Hamhung. Lieutenant Sheil was later evacuated to a hospital in Japan with a brain concussion, while Lieutenant Morency died enroute to the hospital.

On 12 December the borrowed TBMs were returned to their parent commands, and VMO-6 was ordered on board LST Q082 for transportation to Hungnam. Seven helicopters and their crews remained at Yonpo because of a shortage of shipping space. Loading for the remainder of the squadron, eight OYs and two HO3S-1s, was finally completed on 14 December. The LST departed Hungnam the same day and arrived at Pusan two days later. The squadron's forward echelon then moved overland and established a camp at Masan, Korea. Meanwhile, the helicopters left at Yonpo had moved to an area on the beach at Hungnam for security reasons, and on 17 December three flew to the battleship USS *Missouri* (BB 63) for transportation to Pusan. The next day they were transferred, one each, to the aircraft carriers USS *Leyte* (CV 32), USS *Princeton* (CV 37), and the USS *Philippine Sea* (CV 47). The *Missouri* then returned to shore and took on board three of the remaining helicopters with the fourth helicopter going on board the heavy cruiser USS *St. Paul* (CA 73). Later in the day the three helicopters on board the *Missouri* were transferred to the light aircraft carrier USS *Bataan* (CVL 29) where, during the night, they were damaged by high winds. During the trip to Pusan, the four helicopters not already on the *Bataan* were eventually transferred there, and on 26 December the four flyable helicopters were flown to Masan while the others were off-loaded at Pusan.

On 28 December VMO-6 received three Bell HTL-4 and two HTL-3 helicopters along with another HO3S-1. The HTL was a two-place, single-engine helicopter trainer, used by VMO-6 for evacuation, observation, and liaison missions. The Franklin-built engines used by the HTL-3 and HTL-4 produced 178 horsepower, however due to a difference in landing gear and tailboom construction, the HTL-3 was not considered satisfactory for the rugged hills of Korea, while the HTL-4 was thought to be quite adequate. The squadron now had nine fixed-wing aircraft, and eight HO3S-1, two HTL-3, and three HTL-4 helicopters. Additionally, fresh pilots had accompanied the squadron's new HTLs, providing some relief for the "old hands who were getting pretty tired."⁴¹



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A130980

VMO-6 received the Bell HTL-3 helicopter in December 1950. Squadron pilots considered the engine underpowered for operations in Korea.

The new year opened with VMO-6 operating from a landing strip on the Masan waterfront in support of the 1st Marine Division while plans were concurrently being made for operations further north in the vicinity of Pohang, Korea. Plans were also made to send a detachment of four officers and 11 maintenance men to Itami Airbase, Japan, to maintain a growing pool of HTL helicopters there.

On 13 January 1951, the squadron began the movement to Pohang by a combination of truck convoy, LST, and airlift. Operations continued in support of the 1st Marine Division from both Masan and Pohang until the move was completed on 16 January. On 20 January two TBMs were received from Headquarters Squadron, MAG-12 for temporary custody. These aircraft were to be used as radio relay stations between the regiments and the Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) if normal communications failed.*

Captain Harold G. McRay struck a low cable and crashed while landing an HTL-4 at Andong late in the afternoon of 27 January 1951. The helicopter was only a few feet in the air when the accident occurred, and although it was totally destroyed, neither the pilot nor his distinguished passenger, Brigadier General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, was injured.

*Communications problems were expected in light of the mountainous terrain and the 1st Division's 1,600 square mile operating area while carrying out the Pohang-Andong "guerrilla hunt" of early 1951.

For the next several months VMO-6 moved from one airfield to another in support of the 1st Marine Division. The squadron flew spotting and liaison missions and evacuated the division's casualties. The squadron's executive officer, Captain Clarence W. Parkins, had an unusual experience on a medical evacuation flight on 2 February 1951. Parkins and an accompanying corpsman, R.E. Krisky, were delivering a delirious patient from the 1st Marine Division hospital to the hospital ship USS *Consolation* (AH 15) at Pusan. During the flight, the patient became so violent that it was necessary for Parkins to make a precautionary landing. The crew tied the patient to a stretcher, and continued on without further incident.

On 5 April Major David W. McFarland relieved Major Gottschalk as commanding officer of VMO-6. Before the change of command the officers and enlisted men of VMO-6 proclaimed 27 March as Commanding Officer's Day in honor of Major Gottschalk. He had been the squadron's commanding officer since VMO-6 departed the United States and he

The capability to mount two covered litters on the skids of the Bell HTL-4 made it a markedly better aircraft than the HO3S-1 for carrying medevacs.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A132545



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A131705

MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, left, and MajGen Christian F. Schilt, who became Commanding General of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing shortly after this picture was taken, center, prepare to leave the VMO-6 camp area after an August 1951 inspection. At right is Maj David W. McFarland, Commanding Officer of VMO-6, 5 April to 5 October 1951.

now had orders transferring him back home. An elaborate evening meal was enjoyed by all and later that evening a party was given by the squadron officers.

It was business as usual on 13 April when Captain Valdemar Schmidt, Jr. and Corporal Robert Sarvia launched in an HO3S-1 to rescue a downed U.S. Air Force pilot about 20 miles behind enemy lines. Enroute to the pickup point the helicopter received numerous hits from small arms fire causing loss of power and control. A crash landing was made in the hilly terrain and the aircraft rolled over upon impact. Captain Schmidt received minor scratches, while Corporal Sarvia experienced a wrenched leg, a cut on the hand, and a severe case of shock. Accompanying F-51 fighter aircraft strafed the area to keep the enemy away from the crash victims until another helicopter, piloted by Captain Frank E. Wilson,

rescued all the downed airmen. The rescue took place late in the evening and it was necessary for Wilson to find his way back in the darkness without the help of navigational aids. Corporal Sarvia and Major B. W. McIntyre, USAF, the downed pilot, were taken to Medical Company E for treatment.

Earlier in the day Captain James R. O'Moore and Technical Sergeant Phillip K. Mackert had been dispatched in an HO3S-1 to pick up a downed pilot also behind enemy lines. Fighter aircraft from VMF-214 assisted Captain O'Moore in searching the area for the downed pilot but found nothing. During the search, one of the VMF-214 aircraft received enemy fire and crashed. Captain O'Moore landed his helicopter at the scene of the crash and, with Mackert's help, extracted the body of the fighter pilot, later identified as Captain Robert "W" Lebo.

On 14 April Captain Gene "W" Morrison, flying an HO3S-1, made three attempts to rescue a downed pilot behind enemy lines but was driven away by intense enemy ground fire each time. Later, Captain Norman G. Ewers also made an attempt, but numerous enemy hits on his helicopter forced him to return to base. The next day planning continued in an effort to rescue the pilot, who had parachuted into enemy territory. A stretcher was rigged with the intention of lowering it through the tree canopy. An OY aircraft was dispatched early in the morning to fly a reconnaissance mission in the area of the downed pilot. Unfortunately, after several attempts by the OY pilot to pinpoint the downed aviator, the mission had to be abandoned because of inclement weather.

A sudden enemy offensive on 23 April caused all available HTL-4 helicopters to be airborne at 0600 to help evacuate the wounded in the 1st Marine Division zone of action. During the day's operation, a total of 50 critically wounded Marines were evacuated from the front lines to pre-designated collecting and clearing stations in the rear. First Lieutenant George A. Eaton accounted for 16 evacuations from the front lines and Captain Dwain L. Redalen carried out 18 evacuations. Redalen logged 9.7 hours and made his final landing at 1930 with the aid of ground lighting.

The sudden enemy offensive caused the squadron to prepare plans for the perimeter defense of the flightline area and all hands were alerted to the imminent danger of attack. Officers and enlisted men were assigned to platoons for control; machine guns were set up to guard the most dangerous avenues of approach, and all lights were secured at dark.

Evacuations were continued the next day and an HTL helicopter, piloted by First Lieutenant Robert E. Mathewson, was shot down while attempting to evacuate wounded Marines from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. Enemy small arms fire hit the engine, instrument pedestal, and tail section of the helicopter causing partial loss of control. The pilot made a crash landing but was not injured. Another helicopter was sent by the squadron to pick up Mathewson but was driven off by heavy enemy fire. The 1st Battalion had been engaged in fighting its way out of an encirclement and Lieutenant Mathewson was given a weapon and joined the fight. Demolition charges were used to destroy the helicopter.

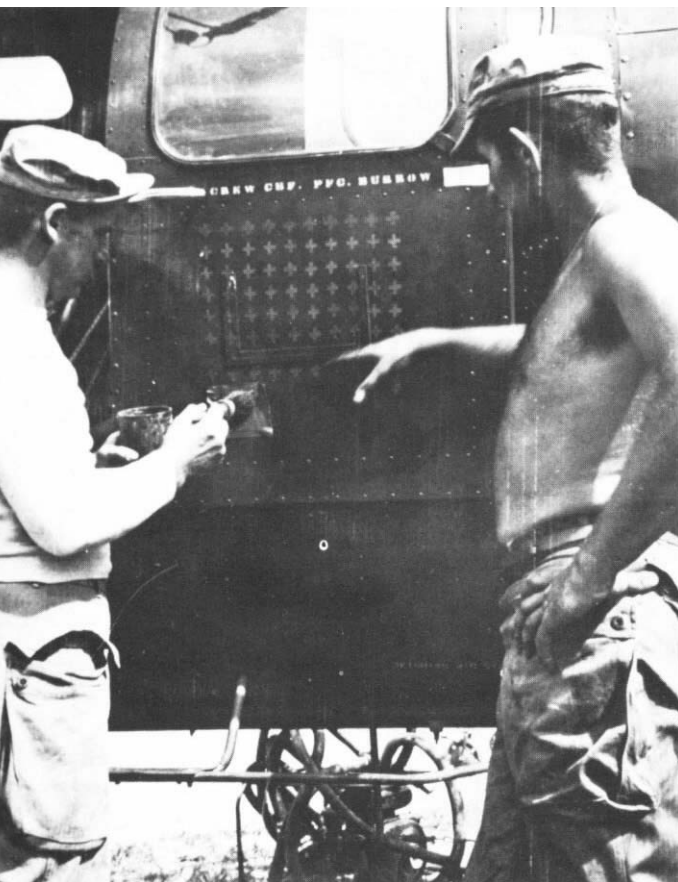
On the same day, 24 April 1951, Technical Sergeant Robert J. Monteith and his observer, First Lieutenant Roscoe F. Good, Jr. were on an artillery spotting mission in an OY over enemy territory when their aircraft had a mid-air collision with a Marine Corsair. Friendly troops in the area witnessed the OY spin to the earth, crash, and burn. Aircraft were dispatched to search for the crashed aircraft and possible survivors, but were unable to locate the crash.*

On 24 April 1951, an OY piloted by Captain John L. Lepire with his observer, First Lieutenant Robert J. O'Shea, was on a reconnaissance mission seeking information on enemy positions. During their flight they flew over a heavy enemy concentration and received fire; no injuries were received but a wing strut on the OY was shot off and Lepire had to make a delicate landing on their return. Later the same day Captain Parkins rescued First Lieutenant Robert R. Wilson of VMF-212, who had parachuted from his disabled F4U Corsair near the front line.

The next month the squadron started receiving the Cessna L-19 "Bird Dog," a light observation aircraft which replaced the older OYs. The L-19, designated the OE-1 by the Marine Corps, was a two-seat aircraft, powered by a 213-horsepower Continental O-470-11, air-cooled engine. The OE-1 had gyroscopic instruments and its rate of climb was superior to that of the OY.⁴²

On 8 May 1951, Captain Alan G. Bateson was giving one of the squadron's new aerial observers, First Lieutenant Edward B. Keyes, Jr., a familiarization

*Good and Monteith were initially listed as MIA but were changed to KIA the same day. Their bodies were recovered 29 August 1951.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A402139

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A167282



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A2855



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A162231

VMO-6's use of the helicopter for combat medical evacuations was a Marine Corps first. In the photograph on the upper left, crew chiefs "record" their latest mission. The squadron performed this mission with a variety of helicopters. Pictured clockwise are the three most significant models it used: the HO3S-1, the HTL-4, and the HO5S-1.

flight of the frontline area in an OY when their aircraft was hit by enemy small arms fire. The aircraft received damage and Bateson was hit in the right leg. The pilot immediately notified the observer that he was hit and turned the aircraft in the direction of a friendly area. First Lieutenant Keyes took off his web belt and passed it to Captain Bateson to use as a tourniquet. Keyes was also able to contact another OY operating nearby, and have it escort the damaged aircraft to the nearest emergency landing field. Keyes had taken over the flight controls and he was flying the plane as best he could. Captain Bateson took over control of the aircraft as it approached the field, and with the assistance of Keyes made a successful landing. Bateson was immediately taken to Medical Company E.

By the middle of May, VMO-6 aircraft had been spotting large concentrations of enemy troops throughout the area and prepared a perimeter defense of its airstrip at Wonju. For the next week the OYs directed artillery fire and airstrikes upon enemy groups. On 19 May an estimated 1,900 enemy were spotted and thirteen F4U Corsairs, twelve AD Skyraiders, and four F9F Panther jets were called to the attack. The airstrikes, combined with six artillery fire missions, left approximately 300 enemy dead, and destroyed four trucks and several gun positions.

On 2 July, First Lieutenant Leonard C. Taft, piloting an OY, and his observer, First Lieutenant Robert J. O'Shea, crash-landed their aircraft in enemy territory during a photographic reconnaissance mission. The squadron immediately began a search with all available aircraft to find their missing companions. Taft's burning aircraft was located but there was no way to ascertain if the crew was still in the aircraft.*

Large numbers of enemy troops continued to be reported, and VMO-6 pilots were busy directing air strikes on the Communists. On 3 September more than 1,100 enemy troops were spotted and the observation section of VMO-6 conducted seven air strikes utilizing nine F4U Corsairs, eight F-51 Mustangs, four F9F Panther jets, and two AD



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A133527

An OE-1 observation plane flies an artillery spotting mission. In May 1951 the squadron began receiving the Cessna-built aircraft, known as the Bird Dog, as a replacement for their aging OY-1s.

Skyraiders. After the air strikes approximately 125 enemy casualties were reported. On the same day they also conducted 25 artillery fire missions which were credited with destroying 95 enemy troops, a supply dump, two enemy command posts, a large bunker, three mortars, and a machine gun position. In addition, six artillery registrations and 43 reconnaissance missions were flown.

On 19 September Master Sergeant Robert J. Russell and his observer Major Douglas K. Morton, crashed on takeoff when the engine of their OE-1 stopped. Upon impact the aircraft burst into flames. Major Morton was evacuated to a hospital in the United States, but Master Sergeant Russell received second and third-degree burns which proved fatal. September continued to be a bad month for the squadron when Major Edward L. Barker's HTL-4 helicopter was hit by enemy artillery fire while he was lifting out a wounded Marine. The pilot escaped injury but the wounded Marine later died from his previous wounds. Two days later an OE was hit by .30 caliber machine gun fire and the observer, Major Robert M. Krippner, was shot through the lower part of his leg. The pilot, Captain Walter P. Dean, was not injured and flew Major Krippner to Medical Company E.

For the remainder of the year and the first part of 1952, VMO-6 continued to support the 1st Marine Division in the X Corps sector.

*There was no conclusive proof of the deaths of either Taft or O'Shea and an investigation stated that they were probably captured by the North Korean Army. It was not until 17 December 1951 that Lieutenant Taft was first mentioned in a propaganda broadcast by North Koreans. First Lieutenant O'Shea was never officially listed as being held captive but was repatriated, along with Taft, in August 1953.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A346183

In 1952 VMO-6 began supporting the 1st Marine Division's operations in western Korea from its homefield at A-9 in the village of Tonggo-ri near Munsan-ni.

When the division moved to western Korea in March, VMO-6 moved to an old landing strip, A-9, in the small village of Tonggo-ri near Munsan-ni.* The forward echelon left Sinchon on 19 March and the move was completed on 29 March 1952. VMO-6 continued operating while the move was being conducted and support of the division was not interrupted. By the end of April the OYs and HO3S-1s were transferred back to the United States and VMO-6 was flying only the OE-1 and HTL type aircraft. The OE-1 had replaced the OY, but the squadron was still waiting for the HO5S-1 helicopter which was to replace the HO3S-1. In any case, VMO-6 had become one of the largest squadrons in the Marine Corps, flying well over 2,000 hours per month.⁴³

*Airfields designated "K" in Korea were major installations, and those in the "X" category were auxiliary strips. "A" designations were near of U.S. Army installations.

The squadron's influence on A-9 is seen more clearly in this ground view. Note the field had been named after 1stLt Arthur R. Bancroft, a squadron pilot killed during the battle for Seoul in 1950.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332835



During the spring of 1952, Major William G. MacLean, Jr., the squadron executive officer, worked out a plan for siting evacuation helicopters, crews, and maintenance personnel at a central location near the front. Known as the forward evacuation echelon it enabled helicopters to reach any part of the front within 5 minutes of takeoff, cutting evacuation time in half. Operations at the echelon began in June, and within the first year over a thousand night evacuations alone had been conducted. It operated 24 hours a day and was manned on a rotational basis by five officers and nine enlisted men. Two to four HTL helicopters provided the lift.⁴⁴



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A346328

The first Sikorsky HO4S-1 helicopters were delivered to VMO-6 in July 1952 by a detachment of six officers and nine enlisted men from HMX-1.

Expanded OE activities also contributed to the squadron's rising operational tempo. Like the helicopter section, the OE crews began operating on a 24-hour basis with the institution of a schedule of night observation flights. As the squadron had found out during the Okinawa campaign, night flights provided a cheap and effective way to suppress the enemy's activities during the hours of darkness. OE operations further increased when they were tasked to provide air support for the ROK Marines on the 1st Division's left flank.*

During July 1952, VMO-6 started receiving the Sikorsky HO4S-1 helicopter, and by the end of the month the squadron had eight HO4S-1s in addition to ten OE-1s and nine HTL-4s. The HO4S-1 was a three-seat utility helicopter capable of carrying up to 750 pounds. For short-range flights, four passengers could be accommodated, and with the seats removed, two stretchers could be carried inside the cabin. The HO4S-1 had three main rotor blades and a two-bladed tail rotor. It was the first U.S. helicopter to be fitted with all-metal blades. The HO4S-1 was powered by a 245-horsepower Franklin 6V6-245-B16F, six-cylinder, vertically mounted, fan-cooled engine. It could reach a maximum speed of 110 miles per hour but normally cruised at 96 miles per hour.⁴⁵

On 9 September 1952, Captain Robert B. Lipscombe, Jr., and Second Lieutenant Roland L. McDaniel were shot down while flying a reconnaissance mission in their OE. Ground observers saw the action, and also saw two parachutes open and drift to the ground behind enemy lines. They later noted the enemy leading personnel to the rear. Both

Lipscomb and McDaniel were listed as missing in action. The same day Captain Donald K. Trotter Jr. and Second Lieutenant Emile A. Walker were also shot down in an OE. Trotter and Walker had been searching for Lipscomb and McDaniel when they were hit and forced down behind enemy lines. They were also listed as missing in action.**

The next month Captain Arthur R. Morin and his observer, Major Robert A. Owens, were shot down in an OE and crashed behind enemy lines. The pilot and observer were listed as missing in action on 4 October.***

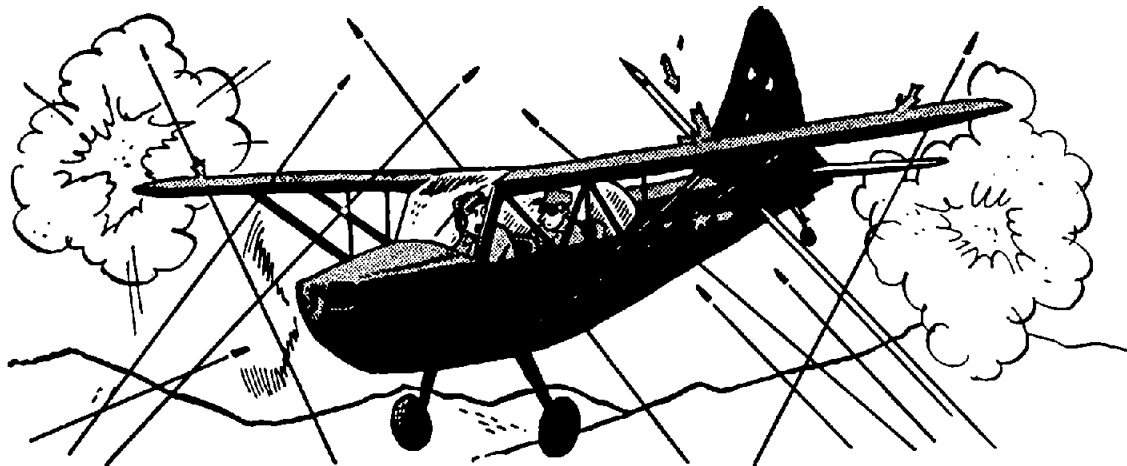
Despite aircrew losses the exceptional morale of the officers and men of VMO-6 was demonstrated by their "can do" spirit. Major Wallace J. Slappey Jr., the commanding officer of the squadron during a portion of 1952 commented:

Morale was extremely high during this entire period and the squadron was loaded with gung-ho personnel. Pilots were actually stealing flights from each other The engineering department was outstanding, working around the clock Pilots from other squadrons in the Wing, having completed their tours, requested extensions and assignment to VMO-6 Every man pulled his weight simply by knowing what had to be done and doing it willingly.⁴⁶

**Captain Robert B. Lipscombe, Jr. and Second Lieutenant Roland L. McDaniel were captured by the North Koreans on 9 September and released in August 1953. When Captain Lipscombe was released he verified the deaths of Trotter and Walker. They had been killed in action when their plane crashed after being shot down.

***On 15 December 1953, the status of both Morin and Owens was changed to that of killed in action and their remains were determined to be non-recoverable.

*The 1st MAW substantially augmented the squadron with pilots to assist it in meeting these increased commitments.



"WELL, IT'S LIKE THIS—AFTER ABOUT A HUNNERT MISSIONS AS A FIGHTER PILOT, THEY FIGGERED I'D BEEN LIVIN' DANGEROUSLY LONG ENOUGH..."

(Marine Corps Association)

This cartoon by SSgt N. E. Packwood, Jr., makes fun of the pilots who, having completed their normal tours in Korea, requested extensions and assignment to VMO-6.

In April 1953, the squadron increased its ability to support the 1st Marine Division when it worked out a system for night close air support. Placed in operation during the latter half of the month, the plan made use of ground troops to light the target area with search lights. When the tactical air observer spotted a target he then directed air strikes or artillery fire on it. The observers' debriefing forms indicated the new system achieved excellent results.

The next month, when the 1st Marine Division's infantry regiments went into reserve status, VMO-6 remained at the front spotting artillery for the 11th Marines.

All of the squadron's HO5S-1s were grounded on 25 July by the Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, because of numerous tail boom failures which had occurred in the United States. The HO5S-1s were permitted to fly only on emergency missions. On 18 July First Lieutenant Charles B. Marino and his observer, First Lieutenant Wilson A. Frease were hit by antiaircraft fire behind enemy lines and crashed out of control in friendly territory. A search party from the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was enroute to the wreckage when it was forced back by enemy artillery fire. After darkness, the party reached the wreckage and the bodies were recovered.

After the armistice agreement was signed near the end of July, the primary mission of the fixed-wing

section of VMO-6 became one of surveillance of the demilitarized zone. It noted any violations committed by aircraft or ground personnel, and reported any troop movements within the Communist-controlled sector. The helicopter section continued providing medical evacuation support. The squadron also remained busy participating in command post exercises run by various commands within the 1st Marine Division. In August, the squadron's last HTL helicopter was transported back to the United States, leaving VMO-6 with 12 OE-1s and 12 HO5S-1s. The parts necessary to repair the tailboom on the HO5S-1s arrived on 2 October and the helicopters were flown to Ascom City, location of Marine Helicopter Squadron 161's (HMR-161) rear echelon, where the repairs were made.*

The squadron maintained a rigid training schedule and newly assigned pilots and crews were indoctrinated in the type of flying necessary for survival in the Korean hills. The helicopter pilots had to become familiar with more than 90 helicopter sites and be able to reach them during the day or night. The OE pilots had to learn to use a hand-held camera while flying and, at the same time, make

*For more information on HMM-161 see: Parker, *A History of Marine Medium Helicopter 161* (Washington: History & Museums Division, HQMC, 1978).

sure their airplanes did not stray over enemy territory. Classroom instructions were held for officers and enlisted men on general military subjects, and all enlisted men spent 2 weeks qualifying on the rifle range while the officers re-qualified with the pistol.

On 14 May 1954, during an HO5S-1 test flight, Major John T. Dunlavy flew the 55,000th flight hour for VMO-6 since its arrival in Korea in July 1950. In August the squadron started to receive the Bell HTL-5 helicopter. The HTL-5 had the same configuration as the -4 model, but had a 200-horsepower engine instead of the 178 horsepower one in the HTL-4.⁴⁷

On Christmas Day VMO-6 played host to the Philanthropic Children's Orphanage. The children were transported from their home to the VMO-6 theater on the afternoon of the 25th where they all received hot chocolate and sandwiches and were welcomed aboard by Major Leonard A. "Ish" Miller, the squadron's commanding officer. Major Miller read a yuletide verse to the gathering and Corporal Byron R. Boyles delivered a Christmas message to the guests. Before they returned home to the orphanage, the children were presented with more food and gifts from the squadron.

All the HTL type aircraft were transferred to Naval Air Facility, Oppama, Japan, on 4 February 1955, in preparation for the squadron's return home. On 18 March 1955, VMO-6 was ordered to Ascom City, and on 26 March, in four different increments, VMO-6 sailed from Inchon for San Diego. The last ship departed on 2 April and arrived in San Diego on the 25th. In recognition of its distinguished Korean combat participation, VMO-6 received three Presidential Unit Citations, one specifically awarded to it as a squadron and two others as an organic unit of senior commands. Additionally, the squadron received a Navy Unit Commendation, an Army Distinguished Unit Citation, and three Korean Presidential Unit Citations.

Pendleton Once More

The squadron once again found itself stationed at the Camp Pendleton airstrip it had left nearly 5 years before. On 27 April, shortly after its arrival, VMO-6 was reassigned from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to Air, Fleet Marine Forces, Pacific (AirFMFPac). Major Miller relinquished command on 20 May to Major Mont L. Beamon. On 15 September the squadron was assigned once more to the 3d Marine Aircraft



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A146811

The squadron began receiving the Kaman HOK-1 helicopter (later redesignated the OH-43D) as a replacement for the HO5S-1 in mid-1956.

Wing, AirFMFPac, and was busy for the remainder of the year 1955 supporting elements of the 1st Marine Division.

On 5 February 1956, the squadron was assigned to Marine Wing Headquarters Group, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, AirFMFPac. From 23 to 27 April, VMO-6 took part in Regimental Combat Team Firing Exercise 1 which involved three regiments. The squadron supported the exercise with spotting, reconnaissance, simulated medical evacuation, and liaison missions. During the first week in May 1956, VMO-6 started receiving the new Kaman HOK-1 helicopter to replace its HO5Ss.

The HOK-1 was a four-place liaison helicopter built by the Kaman Aircraft Corporation and used by the Marine Corps for observation, reconnaissance, medical evacuation, utility, and air/sea rescue. It had twin, intermeshing, counter-rotating rotors powered by a 600 horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1340-48 nine-cylinder, air-cooled engine. The service ceiling of the HOK-1 was 18,000 feet and the maximum speed was 130 miles per hour; normal cruising speed was 75 miles per hour. Its maximum range was 140 miles, and it could remain airborne for a little over two hours.⁴⁸

On 1 July 1956, the squadron was reassigned from the Marine Wing Headquarters Group to Marine Aircraft Group 36 (MAG-36). It continued supporting all of the major 1st Marine Division exercises, while also meeting squadron training requirements. All of the pilots in the squadron were qualified and proficient in both of the unit's aircraft, the HOK-1 and the OE-1, and on 9 October carrier qualifications were flown on board the USS *Badoeng Strait* with the HOKs.

Squadron operations in 1957 and 1958 were highlighted by participation in several major training exercises. The 1st Marine Division and VMO-6 began 1957 with a large amphibious operation on the west coast. Operation Ski Jump involved the entire 1st Marine Division, along with elements of Force Troops, the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, and nearly 100 U.S. Navy ships; more than 50,000 Marine and naval personnel participated. From 3 to 11 June VMO-6 flew combat support missions for the 1st Marines during Operation Quickstep, and on 2 April 1958, five HOKs working with the transport submarine USS *Perch* (APSS 313) flew 75 combat-loaded Marines of Company C, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, from the submarine's deck to the beach at Camp Pendleton. This exercise proved that a large body of troops could be moved ashore from a submarine quickly and safely.

From 2 to 10 February 1959, the 9th Marine Provisional Brigade participated in Phiblex 12-59, a large-scale amphibious assault on "aggressor held" beaches at Camp Pendleton. VMO-6 OEs directed naval gunfire for the landing and later coordinated artillery fire and aerial bombardment for follow-on operations ashore. VMO-6 helicopters were used for liaison, observation, and medical evacuation.

At the end of March, the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, located at Camp Pendleton, moved by truck convoy to Twentynine Palms and began a desert training exercise. Two HOKs from VMO-6 worked with the battalion throughout the exercise to refine methods of air resupply, while OEs from the squadron practiced aerial photography and observation.

In 1960 a cadre system was established by which VMO-6 trained new pilots and ground crews for duty with VMO-2 on Okinawa. After the personnel were trained they were pooled into a rotational draft from which three increments were sent overseas yearly. It usually worked out that being assigned to VMO-6 meant spending about a year with the squadron at Camp Pendleton and another year on Okinawa with VMO-2. Administration of the program was unusual in that all details were handled directly between the squadron and Headquarters Marine Corps.⁴⁹

Throughout 1960, VMO-6 remained at the Camp Pendleton Auxiliary Landing Field, where the squadron averaged about 900 flying hours each month. A variety of missions were flown by the squadron, of which training flights, personnel transport, and medical evacuation were the most common. For the latter mission VMO-6 maintained

a medical evacuation helicopter and crew on constant alert.⁵⁰

In November 1960, Captain Richard E. Skinner evacuated an injured Marine from the rugged, fog-bound hills near Case Springs on Camp Pendleton's northern border. Captain Skinner and his crew chief, Sergeant Charles R. Hern, skillfully maneuvered their HOK helicopter through thick fog at tree-top level to rescue the injured Marine. For this rescue, Captain Skinner was placed on the Kaman Aircraft Corporation's "Scroll of Honor."^{51*}

The United States Pacific Fleet forces held a series of exercises off Southern California from 3 April to 8 June 1961. Operation Greenlight involved more than 50,000 men, 150 ships, and 300 Navy and Marine Corps aircraft, and was conducted in three phases. It was designed to tie together realistically all the elements of Navy and Marine Corps forces under the various conditions of naval warfare. With their HOK helicopters and OE light observation aircraft, the pilots and observers of VMO-6 gained valuable training during Greenlight by providing aerial reconnaissance and photographic support.

On 30 April 1961, Skinner and Hern again teamed up and rescued two injured civilians whose light plane crashed in the desert 60 miles east of Twentynine Palms. Captain Skinner and Sergeant Hern had to fly 162 miles to reach the injured party, making a 5-minute fuel stop enroute. After reaching the crash site, the injured men were loaded on board the HOK and flown to the Twentynine Palms hospital for medical aid.

On 10 May the squadron completed one year and more than 10,000 accident-free flying hours, but its safety record was soon broken. On 15 August 1961 two VMO-6 aircraft, an OE and an HOK, crashed and burned at the mouth of Horno Canyon. The pilot in the helicopter, Second Lieutenant Andrew B. Banks Jr., and the observer, First Lieutenant David A. Wollard, were burned but survived. The crew of the OE, First Lieutenant Clinton D. McDuff, the pilot, and First Lieutenant David H. Henderson, an aerial observer, were killed in the crash. The HOK had lost power and crashed, and the OE, while attempting to render assistance, made a tight turn in the canyon, lost control and crashed.

*The scroll was an award presented by the Kaman Aircraft Corporation to aviators accomplishing hazardous missions in Kaman aircraft.

On 2 October 1961, the squadron participated in Operation Sandstorm held at Twentynine Palms. The 16-day field operation was climaxed by a two-day live-fire demonstration which included air strikes and artillery fires directed by VMO-6.

A 1,000-man battalion landing team (BLT) organized around the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, left Camp Pendleton on 16 January 1962, and began combat-type cold weather training in California's high Sierra Nevada Mountains. The BLT exercise, dubbed Snowflex 1-62, ran from 16 January to 2 February and was supported by VMO-6 HOK helicopters and OE spotter aircraft. The squadron furnished reconnaissance, photography, resupply, and liaison missions for the BLT. During 15-18 April, VMO-6 pilots had the opportunity to play aggressor in a 3-day guerrilla warfare problem run by the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. The squadron played both roles, that of guerrilla air and that of a friendly supporting unit. During the problem it flew aerial reconnaissance and resupply missions.

The squadron again reached 10,000 accident-free hours on 3 August 1962, accomplishing the feat in only 50 weeks. Then, from 16 August to 4 September, eight HOK helicopters and four OE fixed-wing aircraft from VMO-6 provided air support to Marine reservists at Twentynine Palms during Operation Tiger.²²



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A367189

Using a technique dating from the early days of Marine aviation, an OE makes an inflight message pick up during a 1st Marine Division field exercise.

In preparation for a large exercise to be conducted early in 1963, the 1st Marine Division ran a 3-day command post exercise from 26 to 28 September. HOK helicopters and OE aircraft from VMO-6 were kept busy providing a courier service twice daily in addition to liaison, reconnaissance, and observation flights.

The Sierra Nevada Mountains provided a majestic scene for VMO-6 pilots on an operation at the Pickle Meadows, California, cold weather training area.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A368080



In October a general alert necessitated sending a VMO-6 detachment on board naval shipping as part of the newly reconstituted 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB). The MEB had been activated because of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and on 27 October it sailed for the Panama Canal. Passing through the canal on 5 November, the MEB sailed into Caribbean waters, where it became part of the II Marine Expeditionary Force.

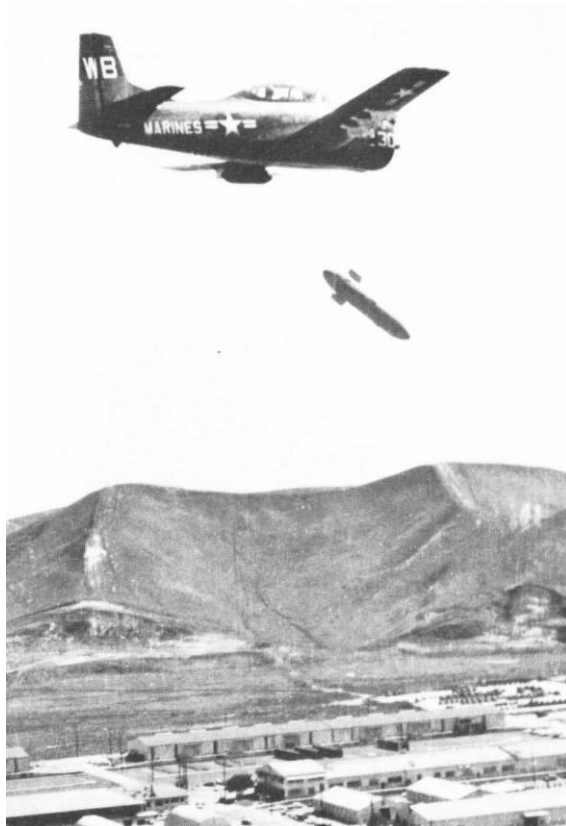
The VMO-6 detachment was on board the USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2), and the squadron commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Henry K. "Hank" Bruce, was in charge. Major Leonard A. Miller, one of the detachment pilots, recalled that at the peak of the crisis "there were several hours when we thought we were going to go in."³³

By 15 December, the crisis had passed, and the 5th MEB returned home. Two days later the VMO-6 detachment returned to Camp Pendleton.

On 6 March 1963, 24,000 Marines stormed ashore at Camp Pendleton's beaches during Operation Steel Gate. The 1st Marine Division formed the nucleus of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Force which was supported by 44 U.S. and Royal Canadian Navy ships. VMO-6 provided spotting for naval gunfire and artillery fire missions, and directed air strikes against the simulated enemy. At the end of Steel Gate, on 12 March, all Marine units involved began a 3-day tactical move to Twentynine Palms and went right into Operation Desert Winds. Again, VMO-6 provided OE spotter aircraft and HOK helicopter support until 17 March.

On 1 August three pilots assigned to VMO-6 were awarded Air Medals for flying combat missions in the Republic of Vietnam. The pilots receiving the awards were First Lieutenants John M. Shields, Donald V. Vacca, and Joseph R. Sales. At the time the word "Vietnam" attracted very little attention, but within two years the Marine Corps and VMO-6 would once again be embroiled in combat against Communist forces there.

In 1963 Vietnam had another impact on VMO-6. Combat operations there had reconfirmed the requirement for an armed escort aircraft to support helicopter operations. Working with Headquarters Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Development Center, Quantico, Virginia, the squadron was assigned a priority task to develop tactics for air support of helicopters, and it was provided with six T-28C "Trojan" aircraft for the effort. The T-28 was a propeller-driven, straight-wing, two place trainer, which had been configured to carry armament. This



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A332836

VMO-6 used the North American T-28C Trojan to develop new close support tactics. Here a T-28 is shown delivering a high speed aerial container.

special program was conducted by a small number of VMO-6 pilots, and data derived from it was subsequently incorporated into helicopter support doctrine used by the Marines in Vietnam.³⁴

On the evening of 18 October 1963, Mr. Robert Masch, a Federal Aviation Agency radio station operator on Vulcan Mountain near Julian, California, heard a low-flying aircraft and instinctively took a compass azimuth of the plane's direction. After hearing that a VMO-6 plane was missing, Masch notified Camp Pendleton. Military aircraft had begun searching along the last known flight path of the missing airplane shortly after the OE became overdue, but low visibility restricted their flight operations. The next morning 10 1st Reconnaissance Battalion Marines, led by Captain Teddy J. Becker, searched the rugged mountains for the missing airplane. Under the guidance offered by Mr. Masch, the search party finally located the wreckage and the body of First Lieutenant Donald G. Jackson. He had been killed when his plane crashed into a 3,000-foot ridge near Vulcan Peak during a mountain storm.³⁵



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A146818

In July 1964, VMO-6 entered the jet age with its acceptance of the Bell UH-1E helicopter. Designated the Iroquois, the H-1 is also popularly known as a Huey.

Operation Pine Tree was the next large exercise in which VMO-6 participated, and it involved supporting the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade. The 9th MEB boarded ships forming an amphibious task force and sailed from Del Mar and San Diego on 22 May 1964. During Pine Tree, VMO-6 aircraft directed the "pre-invasion" bombardment and once the landing force was ashore it supported the Marines by flying reconnaissance and observation flights, evacuating simulated casualties, and helping maintain liaison between friendly ground units. The operation ended on 28 May 1964.

On 6 June VMO-6 held an open house which was followed by a squadron air demonstration. Guests toured the squadron's work spaces, saw static displays, and enjoyed refreshments. The air show began at 1100 and consisted of flight maneuvers normally used in the squadron's everyday operations.

On 27 July 1964, VMO-6 received its first Bell UH-1E helicopter. The UH-1E, commonly known as a "Huey," but officially designated the "Iroquois," was the first turbine-powered helicopter in the Marine Corps. It was to replace both the OE and the HOK. Outfitting the squadron with a single type of aircraft helped simplify the operations and maintenance effort.

The UH-1E helicopter was similar to the Army's UH-1B model, but had an external personnel rescue hoist, special naval avionics, and a rotor brake necessary for shipboard operations.* Powered by an 1,100 shaft-horsepower Lycoming engine, the UH-1E cruised at a speed of around 120 miles per hour, and could carry a 6,000 pound load to an altitude in excess of 16,000 feet. Its cabin could accommodate a crew of two plus seven troops; or three litters, two sitting casualties, and a medical attendant. The Huey required less maintenance than the HOK, and the replacement of any major component—engine, transmission, rotors, etc.—could be made in the field.⁵⁶

By 30 December 1964, VMO-6 had retired the last of its OEs and had received 15 of the new UH-1Es.

*Another major difference between the UH-1B and the UH-1E had to do with their "gunship" variants. The Army version made use of a flexible, turreted, machine gun system, whereas the Marine Corps armament kits provided fixed, forward firing hard points. Thus, the Marine's external ordnance arrangement required a strafing or rocket launching pattern similar to one used by fixed wing aircraft. The Army gunship, on the other hand, could keep a target under fire during roll-ins, pull-outs, or while in an orbit over it.

Fifteen additional H-1s were expected by July 1965. Additionally, as part of the continuing effort to provide an armed escort aircraft for support of helicopter operations, the squadron received three armament kits for the H-1s. The kit contained instructions and hardware necessary to mount two M-60C machine guns and one 2.75 inch rocket pod on each side of the helicopter airframe. The guns and rockets, which were fixed forward, could be fired by the pilot or copilot.* Additional M-60C machine guns were placed on mounts inside the cabin on both sides of the helicopter and were manned by the crew chief and a gunner.

In February a detachment deployed to MCAS, Yuma, Arizona, for ordnance training. As VMO-6 experimented tactically with the armament kits, it found the armed H-1 to be more satisfactory than the T-28 for providing close suppressive fires in support of helicopter operations.

Gradually, the mission of the squadron expanded beyond its traditional roles of observation, medical evacuation, and general utility. In addition to its regular missions, it was training for landing zone preparation, helicopter escort, and close in fire support of assault helicopter operations. It had become quite apparent that squadron training was increasingly oriented toward the type of missions conducted in Vietnam. Further, plans were developed, which called for VMO-6 to provide cadres of UH-1E-trained pilots and crewmen to VMO-2 for subsequent operations in Vietnam. In February, Lieutenant Colonel George F. Bauman, VMO-6's commanding officer during the preceding year, initiated execution of the plan when he led the first contingent of Huey-qualified pilots and mechanics reassigned to VMO-2.**⁵⁷

The HOKs, which were still used by VMO-6 as late as March, were finally retired in April, and VMO-6 became a "pure" Huey squadron.⁵⁸ The UH-1E strength, which had temporarily dropped with a

*The gun sight, an iron-ring and cross-hair variety, was mounted on an arm which swung down in front of the pilots. For proper sight picture, the cross-hairs were lined up with a greasemark placed on the plexiglass windscreen at the time the guns were bore-sighted.

**The plan had been based on relatively light operational requirements in Vietnam, which envisioned VMO-6 providing trained replacements at six month intervals.

The departure of this first cadre left VMO-6 with a skeleton crew to accept aircraft and train replacement personnel.

transfer of nine H-1s to VMO-2, steadily increased until by August the squadron possessed 27.

The squadron planned on sending the second cadre of qualified personnel and nine additional H-1s to VMO-2 in August, however everything changed when orders for movement of the whole squadron were received. Colonel Robert J. Zitnik recalled:

Our orders for overseas assignment, which included the whole squadron vice only a cadre, were highly classified and well kept—even though many of the wives suspected we were all going, none of them really knew the details regarding numbers until the very last instant.⁵⁹

The shipping date had been a closely held secret, and on 10 August 1965, VMO-6 boarded the amphibious assault ship USS *Princeton* (LPH 5) along with other units of Marine Aircraft Group 36. The *Princeton* left Long Beach, California, on 11 August. It was carrying an overload of 170 aircraft, which included all of the MAG-36 aircraft and some Army aircraft as well. Follow-on shipping in the form of two merchant marine vessels carried the group and squadron equipment which could not be taken by the *Princeton*.

During the transit to Vietnam arrangements were made for the equitable distribution of personnel between VMO-6 and VMO-2, and with the *Princeton's* arrival off the coast of Chu Lai on 31 August, the squadron opened another chapter in its already full combat history.^{***}

Combat: Vietnam

On 1 September 1965, VMO-6 and the rest of MAG-36 began ferrying aircraft, personnel, and equipment from the *Princeton* to the airfields of Da Nang East and Da Nang.^{****} Ky Ha, a new helicopter base near Chu Lai, was to be their eventual home field; however, it was still under construction when MAG-36 arrived "in country." During the first few weeks flight operations were reduced but VMO-6 personnel had little idle time. Crew members began cross training with the U.S. Army's

^{***}Both squadrons were to be understrength at first because of a shortage of qualified pilots. This was due to a reduction in VMO-6 training flights during the final month before deployment in order to outfit the H-1s with recently received armament kits.⁶⁰

^{****}Da Nang East later became known as Marble Mountain Air Facility (MMAF).

7th Aviation Platoon, and three days after its arrival the squadron transported the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral David L. McDonald, and the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Richard C. Mangrum, on a field visit.

On the same day, MAG-36 began its movement from Da Nang to Ky Ha. Colonel Robert J. Zitnik, then VMO-6's commanding officer, recalled the base's operating conditions:

Mat #1 at Ky Ha was far from finished when we arrived in country, and MAG-36 operated from a very small clearing while the bulldozers were sloshing around and helicopters [were] operating at the same time There was not much more room than for three or four helicopters . . . and the Seabees were hampered by the monsoon season which delayed starting the second mat for several months.⁶¹

When completed, all of MAG-36—less HMM-363—shared the 600-by-900-foot aluminum mat.* All told there were 65 helicopters parked on and flying from Mat #1. Despite the crowded situation, flight operations were carried out at a heavy tempo. Completion of a second mat soon helped the overcrowded conditions.

By late September VMO-6 was operating in support of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces as well as Marine ground units. In supporting these joint operations the squadron's main tasks were acting as gunship escorts for transport helicopters and maintaining a 24-hour medical evacuation (medevac) alert. On 1 October, VMO-6 gunships were called upon to deliver fire on enemy positions whose heavy small arms had pinned down a Marine ground unit. The helicopters, led by Major Albert J. Kohanowich, attacked the enemy positions with rocket and machine gun fire, enabling the Marines to continue their offensive thrust. It was during this strike mission that VMO-6 inflicted its first confirmed enemy KBA (Killed by Air).

Occasionally the VMO-6 gunships would be called upon to strike enemy emplacements and troops, and the pilots would serve as airborne forward air controllers (FAC[A]) directing fixed-wing aircraft on known enemy targets.

On 8 October, five VMO-6 H-1s participated in Operation Harvest Moon, delivering fire into suspected enemy positions adjacent to helicopter



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A421804

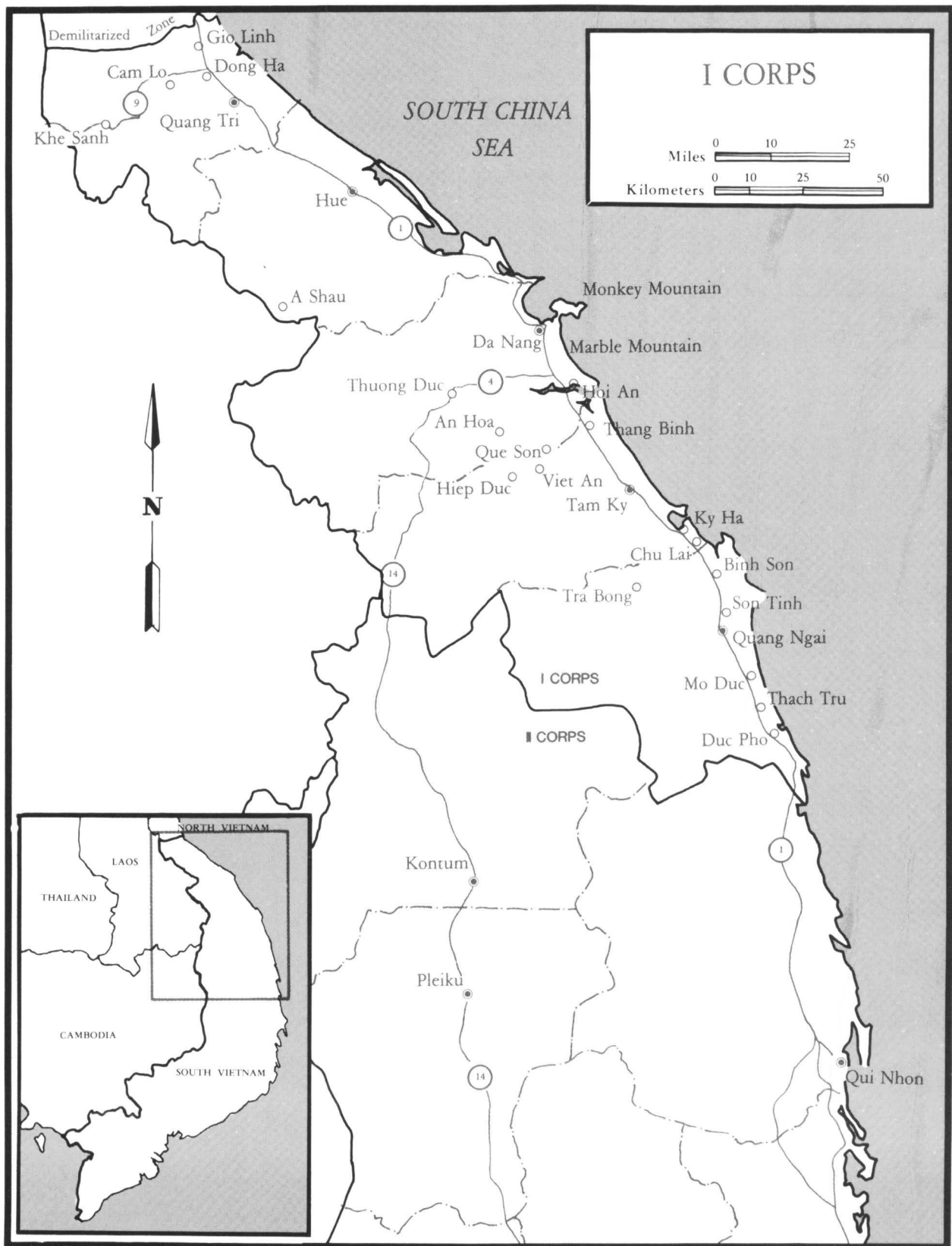
VMO-6 helicopter pilots often acted as airborne forward air controllers (FAC[A]). Here a Huey door gunner observes the deadly results of an air strike which had been controlled from his helicopter.

landing zones (LZ).** The flight leader and commanding officer of VMO-6, Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik, acted as FAC(A) during the entire operation, while the remaining four Hueys continued to strafe the nearby hills until the lift was completed. The next day VMO-6 carried an ARVN advisor on a FAC(A) mission. This was the first time VMO-6 had flown with an ARVN advisor on board and it gave the FAC(A) more freedom choosing targets for fixed-wing aircraft. The idea proved effective.

In mid October marginal flying weather conditions set in and forced a reduction in VMO-6's activities, however, the squadron still managed to keep

*One squadron from MAG-36, HMM-363, had been sent to Qui Nhon to support the U.S. Army's Task Force Alpha.

**The rice harvest protection missions of September and October codenamed Harvest Moon should not be confused with the multi-battalion Operation Harvest Moon conducted by Task Force Delta in December.



the Chu Lai Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) under surveillance, escort transport helicopters on resupply missions, and keep a medevac crew on standby 24 hours a day.

On the night of 16 October 1965, a flight of two VMO-6 Hueys led by Captain Michael H. Conner was launched on an emergency medevac mission. Unable to accomplish the mission due to near "zero-zero" weather in the mountainous terrain, the flight leader assured the isolated Marines that another attempt would be made early the following day.* The next morning a second flight of two H-1s led by Captain Stanley Krueger with Captain Donald L. Wright as his wingman proceeded back to the medevac landing zone. Weather conditions at the time of takeoff were still marginal, with visibility between one-quarter to one-half mile and ceilings of around 100 feet. Captain Krueger expertly led the Huey flight into the area, and after overflying the zone to ensure it was safe, he landed. The two wounded Marines were picked up, and it was determined that the condition of the remaining Marines was so poor that they should also be evacuated.

The weather had improved to the point that transport helicopters could safely work in the area, so Captain Krueger notified the Direct Air Support Center (DASC) of the situation and the need for assistance. Eight H-34s were put on standby by the DASC, and after the VMO-6 flight's return to Ky Ha, the H-1s led the standby aircraft back to the pick-up zone for the extraction of the remaining Marines.

The challenge of the night medevac mission was again demonstrated on 23 October when the VMO-6 medevac crew was alerted that Medical Company B (B Med) in Chu Lai had a patient who needed to be evacuated to Qui Nhon Hospital, 120 miles to the south. The medical evacuation flight, led by Captain Robert G. Whaley, encountered instrument flying conditions just south of Chu Lai and Marine Air Control Squadron 7 was contacted for radar service. An instrument climb out was made to 8,500 feet, and vectors were used until the flight was within 50 miles of Qui Nhon, where two-way radio contact could no longer be maintained. The flight continued on its last assigned heading because neither of the helicopters could pick up the Qui Nhon radio

beacon. The last assigned heading took the flight into the Qui Nhon area and radio contact was finally established with a flare plane which guided the flight toward the city with flares and voice direction. Using landing lights, the pair of H-1s were able to let down over the sea, through a small hole in the clouds where the ceiling was broken. Qui Nhon tower finally spotted the flight's landing lights and vectored the two aircraft to the airfield. The medevac mission was completed and the aircraft returned to Ky Ha the following day.

On 27 October Marble Mountain Air Facility was attacked and VMO-2 lost a number of its H-1s in the attack. VMO-6 temporarily provided seven helicopters for support in the Da Nang area until it officially transferred the aircraft to VMO-2. This left VMO-6 with 11 aircraft. The early part of November saw VMO-6 conduct its normal routine of medevacs, TAOR sweeps, FAC(A), artillery spotting, and naval gunfire adjustment missions.

During the early morning hours of 17 November the Viet Cong (VC) overran the District Headquarters at Hiep Duc. Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik, with the commanding officer of MAG-16, Colonel Thomas J. O'Connor, and a South Vietnamese officer, flew an early morning reconnaissance of the outpost seeking a suitable landing zone for an operation to retake Hiep Duc. No enemy activity was observed during the reconnaissance, and the ARVN 2d Infantry Division designated the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 5th Regiment to be helilifted into the area by MAG-36 and MAG-16 helicopters.

The landing zone to be used was on a small hill, about 80 meters high, with several peaks overlooking it. It had been selected over a larger, natural LZ, by the ARVN officer who had been on the earlier reconnaissance flight. (His decision, based on experience, was a wise one in that events later proved the larger LZ had been surrounded with enemy troops.) Fixed-wing aircraft prepped the zone for 25 minutes before the helicopters were called in. Shortly after the helicopters started landing, enemy machine guns opened up from the sides of the hills overlooking the zone. The enemy's positions dominated the landing zone, and they were actually firing down on the landing helicopters. A VMO-6 Huey flight led by Major Robert E. Presson aggressively engaged the enemy positions, succeeding in temporarily silencing them.

Several H-34s were hit, one of which crashed while trying to make it home, and one crew chief was killed. Colonel O'Connor halted the helicopter lift to allow for additional fixed-wing prep of the area.

*"Zero-zero" weather refers to a meteorological condition where cloud bases touch the earth's surface and there is no forward visibility.

After the fixed-wing aircraft had bombed and strafed the area again, the helicopter assault was resumed. The fixed-wing aircraft continued bombing the enemy gun positions and the Huey gunships strafed the flanks of the landing zone. The entire operation had taken about six hours. Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik and Major Presson were decorated with the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross for their actions during the operation.

Four days later another ARVN outpost, Thach Tru, was attacked and VMO-6 was again called upon for support. Two gunships led by Captain Donald L. Wright responded to the call and left Ky Ha in adverse weather. Upon arriving at Thach Tru the Hueys were put under the control of an Army FAC(A) and were directed to hit numerous enemy positions located around the fort. They left three buildings burning and nearly 20 more damaged. The next day, 23 November, four VMO-6 gunships flew cover for an H-34 troop lift from Chu Lai to Thach Tru. The Viet Cong had attacked a village near Van Ly and, when reinforcements were sent in, three of the four gunships received hits from the Communist equivalent to a .50 caliber machine gun. One aircraft was hit seriously enough to down it in the zone and replacement parts had to be flown in from Ky Ha. First Lieutenant Glenn D. Mann, gunship copilot, was killed in the action.*

On 4 December two VMO-6 Hueys escorted a flight of H-34s on an ARVN lift from Quang Ngai to An Tho, 36 miles south of Chu Lai. On the second flight into the LZ the flight encountered heavy enemy fire. The H-1 flight, led by Major Robert D. Purcell, took the enemy position under fire. On the third trip into the zone the "Klondike" flight was requested to pick up a wounded Army adviser who had been laying in a ditch since the preceding day.** An approach into the zone was "waved off" because of strong enemy automatic weapons fire, but on the next attempt an H-1 landed, and under heavy enemy fire the co-pilot, Captain William M.

Pettigrew, the co-pilot, made his way to the casualty and carried him back to the waiting helicopter. Captain Pettigrew administered medical aid to the wounded adviser throughout the trip back to "B" Med.

Later the same evening two H-1s were scrambled on a false report of a downed helicopter. After becoming airborne, the flight was diverted to the An Tho area to pick up another wounded Army adviser. The aircraft that landed, piloted by Major Herbert J. Harkey, Jr. and co-piloted by Colonel William G. Johnson, the commanding officer of MAG-36, was mobbed by Vietnamese Popular Forces and ARVN soldiers hysterically trying to evacuate the area. Major Harkey tried to take off but the helicopter became overloaded with men hanging onto the skids, and the H-1 started settling back towards the ground. The tail rotor struck a tree causing the helicopter to become uncontrollable and crash. Fortunately the crew was unharmed and, after removing all the weapons and ammunition from their aircraft, they made their way to an H-34 helicopter. The transport helicopter took off under heavy enemy fire while Major Purcell's flight of Huey gunships attempted to suppress the enemy fire.

Operation Harvest Moon, a coordinated operation with the ARVN, commenced on 8 December 1965.

An armed UH-1E flies over troops from 3rd Battalion, 3d Marines, as they wait to be transported by helicopter during operation Harvest Moon.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A194491



*The ARVN 2d Division Assistant Commander, Colonel Pham Van Phu, presented the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, to First Lieutenant Mann's foster father, Ambassador to Thailand Graham A. Martin, after a memorial service at MAG-36. The spent bullet which was taken from Lt. Mann's body confirmed the suspicion that the VC had begun using larger caliber, automatic weapons.⁶²

**"Klondike" was the radio call sign for VMO-6 aircraft during this period.

Its objective was to remove the VC pressure from the Vietnamese government garrisons at Viet An and Que Son. VMO-6 first became involved in Operation Harvest Moon on 8 December when it provided an armed escort for a convoy on a reconnaissance of Highway 1. Later that day a flight of two armed Hueys were sent to escort an emergency troop insertion providing reinforcements for ARVN rangers who had been badly hit by the VC.

Throughout Harvest Moon, VMO-6 provided a command and control aircraft for Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt, Commander, Task Force Delta. The squadron escorted truck convoys and H-34 helicopters and performed numerous medical evacuation missions. It also provided close air support when fixed-wing aircraft could not attack targets due to low visibility. Operation Harvest Moon ended officially on 20 December and had accounted for 407 enemy killed, and 23 captured. For the remainder of the year VMO-6 flew TAOR reconnaissance, helicopter escort, and medical evacuation missions.

The new year picked up where the old had left off. On 5 January 1966, a TAOR reconnaissance flight was told of a suspected roadblock on Highway 1 and immediately proceeded to the area, where it found a roadblock guarded by several lightly armed VC. As the Hueys arrived, three of the VC jumped into a bus traveling north. The Hueys followed the bus to a bridge at An Toon, where it was stopped by Vietnamese troops who captured the VC. The Hueys then returned to the roadblock and found six more VC still in the area. After obtaining clearance from the DASC, and coordinating with the Marine units on the ground, the gunships fired into the area wounding one VC. The VC were kept under surveillance while the ground unit surrounded them. The Marines on the ground killed three VC, wounded another, captured the remaining two, and confiscated two weapons.

On 28 January, Operation Double Eagle began and all MAG-36 aircraft were committed to support the operation. Double Eagle reactivated Task Force Delta, again under the command of General Platt. The operation was to be a coordinated offensive against enemy buildup in the I and II Corps border region. Throughout the operation, which ended on 6 March 1966, VMO-6 Hueys provided continuous on-station FAC(A) and observation coverage as well as helicopter escort, medevac, close air support, emergency resupply, and other routine utility missions.



(Photo Courtesy of Col Robert J. Zitnik)

An H-1 overflies Task Force Delta troops during Double Eagle, an operation conducted along the Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh province border in 1966.

On the evening of 4 February, while escorting transport helicopters on an emergency troop insertion, Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik's H-1 was shot down. After crash landing in a rice paddy, he and his crew of four were picked up by another VMO-6 helicopter piloted by First Lieutenant William L. Buchanan. All were returned safely to Ky Ha.⁶³

During March VMO-6 took part in Operations Utah, Texas, and Indiana, plus numerous other troop lifts, helicopter escort missions, and medical evacuations. During a medevac flight on 22 March, Sergeant John Watson, a VMO-6 crew chief, was credited with saving the life of a wounded Marine by administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when the man stopped breathing. On 23 March 1966, Major Presson relieved Lieutenant Colonel Zitnik as commanding officer of VMO-6. In April VMO-6 added three additional operations to its already expanding list: Nevada, Hot Springs, and Wyoming.

One month later VMO-6 teamed up with the three transport squadrons in MAG-36 and supported many operations of short duration in which one or two battalions were used for sweeping and clearing operations in connection with the local pacification

program. Operations such as Cheyenne I and II, Montgomery, Morgan, Yuma, and Mobile continued throughout the month and kept the 7th Marines and MAG-36 helicopters busy. In turn, their operations kept the VC off guard and constantly moving.

On 7 June 1966, Lance Corporal David J. Schieber duplicated Sergeant Watson's feat and saved an ARVN soldier by administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation during a medical evacuation.

On 15 June 1966, VMO-6 sent two gunships and one "slick" to Commander Task Group (CTG) 79.5 on board the USS *Princeton* for Operation Deckhouse I.* This operation continued until 27 June and during it the Hueys of VMO-6 performed various missions in support of BLT 1/5. Following this operation CTG 79.5 and the Hueys from VMO-6 participated in Operation Nathan Hale. The operation ran from 27 June until 2 July after which the Hueys were released and returned to Ky Ha.

During the early hours of 16 June, Staff Sergeant Jimmie E. Howard's 18-man reconnaissance team, code-named "Carnival Time" was attacked by an estimated battalion of enemy.** The team suffered casualties during the initial assault and sent for a medevac helicopter. At 0250 First Lieutenant Thomas E. Parsons, from HMM-361, flying the medevac H-34 and Captain James M. Perryman, Jr., in an armed H-1 escort took off from Ky Ha for Howard's position. The flight was unable to pick up the medevacs because of intense enemy fire, and a flare ship and fixed-wing aircraft were summoned. Under the direction of Perryman and later Captain John M. Shields, the fixed-wing aircraft of MAG-11 and MAG-12 pounded the enemy. Whenever there was a lull in the fixed-wing support either Perryman or Shields, who relieved each other on station through four rotations, kept continuous helicopter gunship fire on the enemy throughout the night.

An early morning extraction of Carnival Time was attempted but failed because of the enemy's strong position and their intense fire. Marine fixed-wing aircraft again struck the enemy. At 0615, 32 H-34s

*"Slick" was the term used for an H-1 that was not outfitted with rocket pods or machine guns. Slicks were mainly used for medical evacuations, command and control missions, or any other type of utility mission which might come up.

**Staff Sergeant Howard received the Medal of Honor for his courageous example and firm leadership during the ensuing action.

from HMM-362, HMM-363, and HMM-361, escorted by eight H-1s, six from VMO-6 and two from VMO-2, picked up Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines from Hill 54 to reinforce the beleaguered reconnaissance team. Captain Shields was on station as the FAC(A) and had already picked out a landing zone on a ridgeline about 150 meters from the team. After working several flights of attack aircraft in the zone, Shields called in the helicopters. Shortly after Company C had been landed Major William J. Goodsell, the new commanding officer of VMO-6, relieved Captain Shields as the FAC(A). (Goodsell had relieved Major Presson and taken command of VMO-6 five days earlier).

After relieving Captain Shields on station, Major Goodsell made a low pass over the reconnaissance team's position to mark it with smoke when his aircraft was hit by enemy fire. Major Goodsell was killed and his aircraft severely damaged. First Lieutenant Stephen D. Butler, the co-pilot, managed to land the aircraft about 3 miles east of the landing zone where the crew was picked up by their wingman and returned to Ky Ha. The aircraft was destroyed by the VC before a reaction force could move into the area. Major Rawley M. Gregory, the squadron's executive officer, assumed command of VMO-6 after Major Goodsell's death.

On 23 July 1966, Major William R. Maloney relieved Major Gregory as commanding officer of VMO-6; Major Gregory resumed his duties as executive officer.*** In August VMO-6 continued its support of the 1st and 3d Marine Divisions, the Vietnamese I Corps forces, and the newly arrived Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine Corps Brigade.

On 10 October, Captain Eugene O. Marquette III began an interesting day. At approximately 0700 the tail rotor drive shaft on his UH-1E broke several miles west of Tam Ky. Displaying a tremendous amount of aeronautical ability, Captain Marquette managed to land the aircraft undamaged in a rice paddy. An accompanying H-34 picked up the downed crew and departed under enemy fire. Meanwhile, a flight led by Major Maloney's was diverted from another mission. Maloney's flight to the site of the downed Huey to cover the insertion of a security reaction force to protect the aircraft and a VMO-6 maintenance team led by Captain Kenneth D.

***Major Maloney attained the rank of lieutenant general and commanded the 3d, 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A421904

VMO-6 gunships escort HMM-263 aircraft on a mission south of Chu Lai in support of the Second "Blue Dragon" Brigade, Republic of Korea Marines.

Waters. The helicopter was repaired, and the maintenance crew and the reaction force were extracted under fire. During the extraction, one of the pilots in Major Maloney's covering flight, First Lieutenant Larry E. Grimm, was hit in the leg while his aircraft was in a strafing run. Lieutenant Grimm was later evacuated from Vietnam.

On 30 October the squadron was visited by Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, who presented VMO-6 with the Chief of Naval Operations Safety Award for 1966.

November was a busy month for VMO-6 and one that took its toll on the squadron's pilots and aircrewmen. On 7 November, both Captain Donald E. Caverly and Lieutenant Raymond W. Fesperman were wounded by small arms fire on a medevac escort mission. Captain Caverly was able to fly the aircraft to Medical Company C (C Med) at Da Nang where Second Lieutenant Fesperman was admitted, and continued on to the Marble Mountain Air Facility where he landed and was later taken to the G-4 hospital and admitted.

On 14 November, VMO-6 lost three squadron members, Captain Leon G. Chadwick III, Sergeant Daniel M. Bennett, and Corporal Rodolfo M. Gonzalez. All were killed when their Huey was shot down by enemy fire while escorting an H-34. The co-pilot, Colonel Kenneth L. Reusser, a visiting pilot, miraculously survived the crash and enemy fire and

was evacuated to Bethesda Naval Hospital in serious condition.

Another unusual incident occurred when Captain Anthony Pecoraro was credited with saving the life of a fellow aviator on 20 November. Operation Rio Blanco had just started when Pecoraro landed at the site of a crashed CH-46 helicopter and discovered the co-pilot still pinned in the wreckage. Captain Pecoraro cut the injured co-pilot free and evacuated him to Ky Ha.

The new year began with bad weather restricting flying. On 10 January, however, First Lieutenant Steve C. Wilson began what turned into a busy evening for VMO-6. Wilson was shot down while attempting to pick up a wounded Korean Marine in a "hot zone" and his crew chief, Lance Corporal Richard N. Soukup, was wounded.* Major William E. Dodds and First Lieutenant David A. Ballentine were overhead in H-1 gunships and provided immediate suppressing fire for the downed crewmembers and the Korean Marines. Captains John C. Arick and Charles Swinburn arrived on station in time to escort a CH-46 helicopter into the zone to pick up the crew and the wounded Koreans. Four Huey gunships then escorted a reaction force into the zone. By this time it was dark and the weather had deteriorated, making the last portion of the operation extremely hazardous. Later in the evening Captain Kenneth D. Waters led another flight into the zone and successfully evacuated 10 wounded Korean Marines.

On 28 January 1967, VMO-6 set a squadron record for hours flown and for number of fixed-wing flights controlled in a 24-hour period. At midnight the squadron had logged 127.2 flight hours and controlled 27 flights of fixed-wing aircraft. During February VMO-6 continued flying gunship escort, medical evacuations, and TAOR reconnaissance flights. Occasionally, the squadron would also fly H-1s outfitted with loudspeakers and operated by a Vietnamese psychological warfare representative who made propaganda broadcasts throughout the flight. This aircraft became known as the "Hollerin Huey."

On 27 March 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Nelson relieved Lieutenant Colonel Maloney as commanding officer of VMO-6. The months of March and April were busy ones for the squadron. VMO-6 flew 3,134 hours, 7,218 sorties, and 2,016 missions

*"Hot zone" was a term used to describe a landing zone which was receiving enemy fire.

while participating in seven operations: Desoto, Beacon Hill I, Deckhouse VI, Sea Dragon, Shawnee, Beaver Cage, and Union. During this two-month period the squadron carried 896 passengers, performed 1,027 medical evacuations, controlled 166 fixed-wing flights, and accounted for 40 enemy killed. (From 1 September 1965 to 30 April 1967, VMO-6 had been credited with 708 enemy KBAs.) During April four VMO-6 aircraft were sent north and operated out of Phu Bai near Hue.

Unfortunately, the month of April also presented its losses to the squadron. On 5 April one aircraft was destroyed and its crew killed when it landed on an enemy mine near Nui Dang in support of Operation Desoto. Killed were Captains Alan J. Dean and Brooke M. Shadburne along with Corporal Joseph A. Scruggs, the plane's crew chief. Hospital Corpsman First Class Thomas A. Parker, a Navy corpsman assigned to the medevac aircraft, was also killed.

On 19 August 1967, Captain Stephen W. Pless, piloting a Huey gunship, answered an emergency call for help; four American soldiers were stranded on a nearby beach and were being overwhelmed by a

large Viet Cong force. Captain Pless with his crew, Captain Rupert E. Fairfield, Jr., Gunnery Sergeant Leroy N. Poulson, and Lance Corporal John G. Phelps, flew to the scene and found 30 to 50 enemy soldiers in the open. Using the H-1's guns and rockets, Captain Pless attacked the enemy, killing and wounding many, and driving the remainder back into a treeline. Captain Pless then maneuvered his helicopter between the wounded men and the enemy, providing a shield which permitted his crew to retrieve the wounded soldiers. The enemy continued to rush the helicopter, again and again closing to within a few feet of Pless and his crew before being driven back by fire from the Huey's guns. After the wounded had been loaded on board, Captain Pless maneuvered his helicopter out to sea, but before it became safely airborne, the overloaded aircraft skimmed the water several times. Jettisoning his rocket pods and excess gear, Captain Pless was finally able to get the aircraft aloft and return the wounded to safety and medical care. Captain Pless received the Medal of Honor, and his crew members the Navy Cross for their actions.⁶⁴

Pictured from left to right are: GySgt Leroy N. Poulson, LCpl John G. Phelps, Capt Rupert E. "Skeets" Fairfield, and Capt Stephen W. Pless. On 19 August 1967, this VMO-6 helicopter crew participated in an action for which Capt Pless was awarded the Medal of Honor, and Fairfield, Poulson, and Phelps were awarded the Navy Cross.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A422192



On 17 September 1967, Lieutenant Colonel William J. White relieved Lieutenant Colonel Nelson as commanding officer of VMO-6.* On 5 October 1967, VMO-6 moved north to Phu Bai, staying there until 11 November when the squadron moved further north to the newly constructed field at Quang Tri near the demilitarized zone (DMZ).**

The Marine combat base at Khe Sanh occupied most of VMO-6's flight missions for the early part of 1968. Nearly 6,000 Marines and South Vietnamese rangers were pitted against an enemy force roughly three times as large. It was necessary for supplies to be airlifted into Khe Sanh and the other outposts occupied by Marines on the high ground overlooking the base. The battle at Khe Sanh escalated into a major operation of immense political as well as military importance. Marine, Air Force, and Navy aircraft provided continuous close air support, and Marine and Air Force cargo aircraft logistically sustained the defenders during the siege despite heavy enemy antiaircraft fire.

VMO-6 became heavily engaged in the Khe Sanh area early in January, escorting transport helicopters, evacuating wounded, flying FAC(A) missions, and providing close air support whenever the situation demanded. Aircrews operating at Khe Sanh quickly became aware of the increased threat posed by the enemy's heavy use of 12.7mm and 37mm antiaircraft weapons.

In February VMO-6 helicopters, like all aircraft operating in the Khe Sanh area, were being hit by enemy fire with regularity. On 2 February, while flying a low-level mission, shrapnel from either a mortar round or an artillery shell damaged an H-1 being piloted by Lieutenant Colonel White. Both White and his co-pilot, First Lieutenant Dennis B. McBroom, received minor injuries caused by flying plexiglass from a shattered windscreen, but they were able to return the aircraft safely to Quang Tri. On 8 February, Captain Edward Kufeldt's co-pilot, First Lieutenant George E. Rosental, was seriously wounded when their Huey received more than 30 hits on a medevac mission to pick up survivors from a Special Forces camp which had been overrun near

Lang Vei. On 11 February, Captain Calvin S. Croom III was hit in the thigh by a small arms round while flying as co-pilot with Lieutenant Colonel White during a resupply mission west of Khe Sanh.

On 16 February 1968, two Huey gunships were launched to assist in the emergency extraction of reconnaissance team "Box Score." The transport helicopter landed in the zone and picked up the team, but as it was lifting out, two team members jumped out to help another member who had failed to get on board. The transport helicopter continued out of the zone because of extensive battle damage. One of the VMO-6 escorting H-1 gunships, "Seaworthy" 4-21, went into the LZ to pick up the remaining three members. Lifting out of the zone it received heavy enemy fire and crashed.*** Killed immediately were the pilot, First Lieutenant Bobby F. Galbreath, the co-pilot, First Lieutenant Paul A. Jensen, and the gunner, Staff Sergeant Jimmy E. Tolliver. The crew chief, Corporal Harry W. Schneider, died of injuries enroute to Da Nang the following day. One of the team members died in the crash, one died later of injuries, but the last received medical treatment in time to be the sole survivor.

Other helicopter squadrons were not faring any better than VMO-6, and it soon became apparent that the problem of getting helicopters to and from the Marine outposts was becoming critical. The tactics being used needed improvement. Huey gunships, though making a valiant effort, did not possess the heavy volume of fire required to keep the air lanes open to the outposts around Khe Sanh. As a result the 1st MAW adopted another system which provided more muscle.

Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), and Major General Norman J. Anderson, Commanding General, 1st MAW, conceived the idea while the details were worked out by Colonel Joel B. Bonner, Lieutenant Colonel White, and Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Carey. The solution was basically a page out of the Fleet Marine Force Manual for helicopter support operations. All helicopter flights to the hill outposts were to be escorted by strike aircraft which would provide suppressive fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Carey, the 1st MAW Operations Officer and one of the planners, later described

*Lieutenant Colonel William J. White attained the rank of lieutenant general and became the Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation.

**With the move to Quang Tri the squadron was reassigned to Provisional Marine Aircraft Group 39 (ProvMAG 39).

***VMO-6's radio call sign during this period had been changed to "Seaworthy."



(David Douglas Duncan)

Aircrews wait for the ceiling to lift. In addition to the fierce enemy opposition during the battle for Khe Sanh, aircrews also had to face the miserable weather conditions.

the mechanics of what was termed the "Super Gaggle":

Success of the effort was predicated on timing, coordination, and often times luck. Luck, as used, refers to the ability to guess whether the weather would hold long enough to complete an effort once it got underway. The effort began with the TA-4 on station determining if sufficient ceiling existed for the "Scooters" of MAG-12 to provide sufficient suppressive fires to assure success. . . . Once the TA-4 called all conditions go, an "H" hour was set and the Super Gaggle began. Twelve A-4s would launch from Chu Lai while simultaneously 100 miles to the north 12-16 helos would launch from the Quang Tri helo base and proceed to the Dong Ha LSA (Logistics Support Area) for supply pickup. The object was for all aircraft to arrive in the objective area on a precise schedule. So the operation generally consisted as follows: (1) Softening up known enemy positions by four A-4s, generally armed with napalm and bombs; (2) Two A-4s armed with CS (tear gas) tanks saturate enemy antiaircraft and automatic weapons positions; (3) 30-40 seconds prior to final run in by the helos two A-4s lay a smoke screen along selected avenues of approach. . . . (4) While helos make final run into the target, four A-4s with bombs, rockets, and 20mm guns provide close-in fire suppression. . . . Once the helos commenced their descent, the factors of weather, their 4,000-pound externally carried load, and the terrain would

not permit a second chance. If an enemy gun was not suppressed there was no alternative for the helos but to continue. They (the transport pilots) were strengthened with the knowledge that following close on their heels were their gunships ready to pick them up if they survived being shot down. Fortunately, these tactics were so successful that during the entire period of the Super Gaggle only two CH-46s were downed enroute to the hill positions. The crews were rescued immediately by escorting Huey gunships.^{61*}

The squadron remained busy throughout March, but with the advent of the Super Gaggle, aircraft and personnel losses were reduced. On 24 March 1968, a change in command ceremony was held and Major Bertram A. Maas, the former executive officer of VMO-6, relieved Lieutenant Colonel White as commanding officer. Unfortunately, the day was marred with the loss of another squadron pilot. Captain Joseph J. Hanley's aircraft was hit while pro-

*For comparison, as many as 16 helicopters were utilized up to four times in one day during the Super Gaggle without a loss. Prior to the conception of this technique, as many as three helicopters were shot down in one day around Khe Sanh.



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A421451

The UH-1E was designed for observation and utility tasks, but by 1968 nearly two-thirds of its Vietnam missions were flown in the role of gunship.

viding suppressive fire for an emergency medevac. The aircraft lost directional control and went into a violent spin, crashed, and immediately burst into flames. The door gunner Private Marion C. Trivette Jr., managed to get Captain Hanley and the crew chief, Sergeant Holmer G. Clark, both of whom had been knocked unconscious in the crash, out of the wreckage. He was unable to get to First Lieutenant William G. Hall because of the intense fire surrounding the left side of the aircraft. An H-34 transport helicopter landed in the zone and, under heavy enemy fire, picked up the three crew members.

After the H-34 had lifted out of the zone, Major Robert L. Neff, wingman and gunship leader, spotted Lieutenant Hall staggering about 20 feet from the burning Huey. With the aid of fixed-wing aircraft dropping napalm on the enemy, Neff landed at the crash site and his crew chief, Corporal Robert C. Rich, got to Hall and carried him to the waiting Huey. All four crew members were evacuated to Medical Company D (D Med) at Quang Tri.

Lieutenant Hall was given emergency treatment for second and third degree burns over 60 percent of his body and was immediately sent to the hospital in

Da Nang. Also sent to Da Nang were Sergeant Clark, who was later evacuated to Japan for treatment for burns and a broken knee, and Private Trivette for treatment of minor burns and a chest injury. Captain Hanley was treated at "D" Med for a cut mouth and an injured back and returned to his squadron. Sadly, word was received the following day that Lieutenant Hall had died from his burns.

April continued to take its toll on VMO-6 aircraft and crew members. On 11 April a VMO-6 Huey collided with an H-34 in mid air, 7 miles west of Dong Ha. The H-34 came apart before reaching the ground and the H-1 burned upon impact. There were no survivors in either aircraft. Killed in the H-1 were Captain Bruce F. McMillan, First Lieutenant Ronald E. Riede, Corporal Paul J. Allen, and Lance Corporal Michael G. Demarco. On 25 April a Huey piloted by Captain James P. Cawley crashed and burned 7 miles east of Quang Tri with no survivors. Killed were Captain Cawley, First Lieutenant Robert C. Kimmel, and Privates First Class Brock R. Schtamm and Edgar C. Laye.

The light fixed-wing reconnaissance plane, so prevalent during World War II and the Korean War, was back with VMO-6 in July 1968. The O-1C, "Bird Dog," formerly the OE-2 (Cessna model 321), was a redesigned version of the O-1B for the Marine Corps. It had a Continental O-470-2 six cylinder, horizontally opposed, air-cooled engine. The O-1 seated a pilot and an observer in tandem and had a cruising range of 530 miles, and normally cruised at 104 miles per hour.⁶⁶

A Marine O-1 makes a pass over the Imperial City of Hue during the Tet Offensive. In July 1968, the O-1 "Fingerprint" detachment was assigned to VMO-6.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A190883





Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A700423

In November 1968, VMO-6 received the North American OV-10A "Bronco." During much of the war the Marine Corps had suffered from a paucity of observation aircraft assets; this was generally alleviated with the arrival of the OV-10 in Vietnam.

The detachment of O-1s and accompanying personnel were assigned to the squadron to supplement its FAC(A), artillery spotting, and reconnaissance missions. The H-1s had been spending a majority of their flight time in the role of armed escort, and the addition of O-1s to the squadron provided much needed resources for observation missions. That the O-1s were a welcome sight to VMO-6 may be seen by the unit's Command Chronology entry:

12 July 1968. — Today was a big day for VMO-6. For the first time since deploying to the Republic of Vietnam in September 1965, fixed-wing aircraft were again in the squadron. The squadron happily accepted the joining of the O-1C Detachment. VMO-6 has continually enjoyed operating with Fingerprint,* and is proud to say that they are now a formal part of our squadron.⁶⁷

On 20 September 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Maas was relieved by Major Hans A. Zander as commanding officer of VMO-6. In November, under cloudy skies, the squadron flew 2,636 hours and had 10 pilots who flew over 100 hours each.

November 1968 also saw the introduction of the OV-10A "Bronco" into VMO-6. The Bronco, built by North American Rockwell, was a light armed reconnaissance plane developed for counter-insurgency missions. It was powered by two 714 shaft

horse power AiResearch T76 turboprop engines with Hamilton Standard three-blade propellers. It seated a crew of two in tandem on ejection seats. The OV-10A carried four weapons attachment points, each with a capacity of 600 pounds, under short sponsons extending from the bottom of the fuselage on each side under the wings. A fifth attachment point, with a capacity of 1,200 pounds was located under the center of the fuselage. Two .30 caliber M60C machine guns were carried in each sponson.⁶⁸ The Bronco pilots quickly familiarized themselves with the area and began conducting visual reconnaissance missions as well as artillery control, naval gunfire spotting, and FAC(A) missions.

On 2 December, Seaworthy 97-1, an O-1, was lost. The downed aircraft was finally spotted and a search and recovery team was landed at the crash site. Unfortunately, there were no survivors. Killed were First Lieutenant James R. Reese and First Lieutenant Richard E. Latimer, Jr.

VMO-6 ended calendar year 1968 with 21,758 flight hours. Its aircraft assets included 10 OV-10s, 9 O-1s, and 12 UH-1s (all of which were gunships). Marine Light Helicopter Squadron 367 (HML-367), which now had a detachment at Quang Tri, began picking up all slick commitments.

In January 1969 the 3d Marine Division began a mobile offensive which struck at the enemy in the western reaches of I Corps. The code name for the

* "Fingerprint" was the radio call sign for the O-1C detachment.

major new offensive was Dewey Canyon, and VMO-6 became heavily involved in supporting the 9th Marines as well as ARVN units in the operation which took place in the A Shau and Da Krong valleys.

The operation represented an outstanding example of air-ground teamwork, requiring the highest degree of professional skill and moral courage from the Marine aviators due to the hazards presented by mountainous terrain, inclement weather, and the strength of the enemy. The H-1s, O-1s, and OV-10s of VMO-6 were all extensively utilized in the support of Dewey Canyon on a 24-hour basis. Hueys provided gunship escort for the resupply and medevac missions, while the O-1s and OV-10s provided visual reconnaissance, artillery spotting, and airborne control of close air support. Additionally, the OV-10s also provided flare illumination for night emergency missions until C-130 or C-117 aircraft could come on station.

On 28 February 1969, while escorting transport helicopters on a Dewey Canyon mission a VMO-6 H-1 was shot down by heavy enemy antiaircraft fire. Lost were First Lieutenants Edwin A. Keeble, Jr. and David K. Jacobsgaard, and Lance Corporals William J. Brencich and Edward W. Sanchez.

Operation Dewey Canyon concluded on 18 March 1969, and as U.S. Army Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell, commander of U.S. ground forces in northern I Corps under CG III MAF summed up, "Dewey Canyon deserves some space in American military history by sole reason of audacity, guts, and team play. I cannot applaud too highly the airmen of the 1st MAW in a variety of roles."⁶⁹

The conclusion of Dewey Canyon did not relieve VMO-6 from the ever-present requirement for air support of Marine units stretched across the northern reaches of I Corps. On 30 March 1969, H-1s and OV-10s teamed up with helicopter transports and fixed-wing flare ships in a challenging night medical evacuation at LZ Argonne, a remote site near the Laotian border. At 0105 in the morning a section of H-1 gunships launched on the emergency mission. Experiencing an equipment failure, the wingman of the section had to abort, but the flight leader, Major Kenneth C. Carlon, elected to continue to the area despite the fact that his own aircraft was having equipment difficulties and the weather was IMC (instrument meteorological conditions). In spite of these adverse conditions, the mission was successfully completed. Other VMO-6 personnel involved in the operation included Major William B. Jessup, an

OV-10 pilot who acted as the airborne coordinator and provided flare illumination, and Captain Douglas B. Page, a VMO-6 Bronco pilot who was temporarily assigned to the supported ground unit as a forward air controller.

The significance of the operations conducted by VMO-6 during March was that they again demonstrated the ability of Marine Corps aviation to conduct offensive operations under the most adverse kinds of weather conditions. During the month the squadron performed over 220 actual instrument climbouts and recoveries.

On 2 April 1969, Lieutenant Colonel Billy D. Bouldin assumed command of VMO-6 when he relieved Lieutenant Colonel Zander. Weather remained marginal during the first part of the month, but four additional OV-10s were received on 11 April raising the number of OV-10s on hand to 18 and making it possible for the squadron to accumulate over 3,000 hours of flight time during the month, a record for Marine observation squadrons in Vietnam to that time.

Daily taskings in support of the 3d Reconnaissance Battalion had long been a challenging mission for VMO-6. Seaworthy gunships lead flights of helicopter transports on insertion and extraction missions of small, five to seven men recon teams throughout the 3d Division TAOR, and strong bonds formed between pilots and reconnaissance personnel. The recon mission required very detailed briefings between the gunship crews, the transport crews, and reconnaissance team leaders and staff.

Squadron gunships land to reload their 2.75-inch rocket pods at a ProvMAG-39 ammunition supply area during Operation Nanking/Scotland II.

Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A192087



Further, during the conduct of the daily schedule of insertions and extractions it became almost "routine" for an emergency condition to develop because of enemy detection of a team in the field. The emergency extraction which followed usually had to be carried out under some form of adversity—such as heavy enemy fire, bad weather, or conditions of darkness. On these occasions, the Seaworthy flight leader had to use all of his skills in coordinating the use of supporting arms while also carrying out his immediate mission of escorting the transport helicopters.

A brief description of the events of the day from the VMO-6 command chronology for 24 April provides an accurate picture of squadron daily "routine" for the year 1969:

24 April 1969. Seaworthy OV-10s and O-1s controlled 16 flights of fixed-wing aircraft in support of the 3rd Marine Division today. In the late afternoon recon team Carpet came under attack and Seaworthy UH-1Es and OV-10s teamed up to escort Chatter Box transports for the emergency extract of Carpet. When a Chatterbox transport was shot down in the zone, the Seaworthy aircraft coordinated and supported the extraction of the recon team and Chatter Box crew. Assistance was given by the Seaworthy OV-10 flare bird as the extract operation continued into the night.⁷⁰

May was another month in which VMO-6 conducted a heavy flying schedule, and during which several squadron crewmen were killed or wounded. On 6 May, First Lieutenant S. P. Billipp and his aerial observer, First Lieutenant John R. Hagan, failed to return from their visual reconnaissance mission in an O-1. The crew had been last seen flying along Highway 9, near the Laotian border. Less tragic, but still serious mishaps occurred for the squadron when, on 18 May, the newly assigned commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bouldin, experienced a tail rotor malfunction while flying an H-1, and was forced to crash-land to avoid hitting a group of Vietnamese children. The injuries sustained by Lieutenant Colonel Bouldin in the accident ultimately required his medical evacuation to the United States. A third major incident occurred on 29 May when an OV-10 crewed by Captain John R. Morgan and First Lieutenant Robert J. Moriarty was hit by enemy fire while on a visual reconnaissance mission southwest of Khe Sanh. The crew ejected from their burning aircraft; happily, however, they were picked up by a CH-46 and returned to Quang Tri in rapid fashion. Thus, as May neared its end the squadron had experienced its

third major aircraft loss of the month and all three squadron aircraft types were represented.

May ended with VMO-6 breaking the flight time record it established only the previous month, having flown 3,191.7 hours. This was the most flight time the squadron would accumulate in any one month period during the war.

Heavy flight operations continued into June. On 3 June squadron UH-1s and OV-10s supported CH-46s in five separate attempts to complete a night emergency medical evacuation. As each attempt was made the zone came alive with small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. The H-1s attacked the firing positions again and again, trying to drive back the enemy forces. The OV-10s controlled the deliveries of the flare-ship during each try, and directed artillery and close air support. In the early morning light, on the fifth time into the zone, the medevac was completed.

This kind of teamwork by VMO-6 aircrews was displayed on numerous occasions during the month. On 5 June 1969, First Lieutenant Moriarty launched on a night hop scheduled to allow him to complete his annual night flight time requirements. A secondary mission of the flight was to assist in the night rocket belt watch. At dawn, while searching for a mortar site firing on a Marine position near Gio Linh (A-2), he spotted five rockets sitting on launch stands aimed at Dong Ha. He immediately adjusted naval gunfire into the area, and as his fuel state reached its "bingo" level, he turned the mission over to a relieving Seaworthy aircraft. Close air support was directed onto the site, and the destruction of the enemy rocket positions averted an attack on friendly forces.

Two days later, VMO-6 participated in an emergency extraction which developed into a three-day operation. The action began on 7 June when Seaworthy OV-10s were directed to cover the extraction of recon team "Fighting Mad." Airborne control of fixed-wing and helicopter gunships in support of the mission was conducted despite intense enemy ground fire for several evolutions while waiting for the transport helicopters to arrive. Despite the volume of fire supplied by H-1 gunships, a transport helicopter was shot down in the zone. More flights of fixed wing were controlled by the OV-10s against the well-entrenched enemy, but the second extraction attempt resulted in a second transport helicopter being crippled in the zone. As night fell and weather started to become a problem, Seaworthy aircraft

began coordinating supporting arms for the surrounded Marines. Artillery and close air support by fixed-wing attack aircraft, C-130 flareships, and C-47, C-119, and H-1 gunships were controlled by the OV-10s.

As the sun rose on the 8th, the recon team was still intact. OV-10s prepped a nearby landing zone for the insertion of a quick reaction force, while H-1s provided gunship escort for the CH-46 transports. The flight was shot out of the zone on the first attempt, but made a successful insert on the second try. As the day closed the reaction force was in place and ready to move toward Fighting Mad.

While the helicopter assault by the reaction force was taking place, another recon team, "American Beauty," ran into trouble 4,000 meters west of Fighting Mad. Twice CH-46s attempting to extract it had been forced back by enemy fire, and two H-1s and an OV-10 had taken hits while providing suppressive fire. Fighting Mad's position had stabilized with the assistance of Marine artillery, permitting Seaworthy OV-10s to spend the night over American Beauty, coordinating supporting arms much the same as they had the preceding night for Fighting Mad.

During the day on 9 June, the reaction force joined up with Fighting Mad and the downed aircrews, and together they made their way back to the insert LZ under cover of VMO-6 aircraft. Late in the day the recon team and aircrews were taken out, and on 10 June, the reaction force joined up with the second beleaguered unit, American Beauty. After establishing a new LZ, American Beauty was extracted before dusk on 10 June.

The Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, praised VMO-6 pilots and crewmembers along with their ProvMag-39 counterparts for the professionalism and tireless efforts displayed in safely recovering the two recon teams.

On 17 June, Major Albert K. Charlton, the executive officer, assumed command of VMO-6 from Lieutenant Colonel Bouldin, who was evacuated to Balboa Hospital in San Diego, California, due to injuries received in his May accident. Also on the 17th the runway at Quang Tri was closed for repairs and VMO-6 began operating from three locations. The UH-1s remained at Quang Tri, operating from a mat area adjacent to the runway, the OV-10s went to Phu Bai, and the O-1s moved to Dong Ha. On 23 June the runway reopened and the fixed-wing detachments returned to Quang Tri.

A decrease in enemy activity at the end of June and the first part of July reduced the number of commitments for VMO-6.

On 2 September, a devastating typhoon hit Quang Tri with tremendous force. It tore off roofs, collapsed buildings, and disrupted all operations. VMO-6's main hangar collapsed, destroying an O-1. Immediately after the storm, recovery operations were started and VMO-6 was ready for flight operations the next day. Most of ProvMAG-39's helicopters, however, had been damaged because of high winds. Poor weather followed the storm and the few missions flown were under cloudy skies and low ceilings. There was also a lull in action during the latter part of the month because of a cease fire initiated by the enemy in observance of Ho Chi Minh's death.

During September 1969, VMO-6 prepared for redeployment as part of the second increment of U.S. withdrawals from Vietnam, and on 1 October, the squadron's advance party arrived at the Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF), Futema, Okinawa. The H-1s and the majority of the squadron's personnel, designated as Detachment A, remained behind, operating from Phu Bai, while awaiting the arrival of the amphibious transport dock USS *Cleveland* (LPD 7). On 8 October, VMO-6's 18 OV-10 aircraft left Quang Tri for a four-leg trip to MCAF Futema, while the Huey pilots remained at Phu Bai and flew missions for HML-367. On 12 October, VMO-6 came under operational control of MAG-15.

Tenancy on Okinawa and Decommissioning

On 14 October all but two of the squadron's OV-10s arrived at Futema. One OV-10 was grounded with mechanical difficulties at Naval Air Station (NAS), Cubi Point in the Philippines. Another OV-10 remained at Cubi Point to assist in repairs. They were both able to join the others at Futema two days later. Meanwhile, at Phu Bai, the squadron's H-1 aircrews were still flying missions for HML-367. (Eight pilots and four crew chiefs had been assigned to HML-367 for 30 days' temporary duty.)

The squadron loaded the rest of its personnel and H-1 aircraft on board the *Cleveland* on 21 October, and departed for Okinawa the next day. Three days later it arrived at White Beach, in Okinawa, and started unloading. The Squadron's H-1s were flown to MCAF Futema.

VMO-6 spent the next week getting settled into working spaces and living quarters. All members of the squadron attended lectures pertaining to Okinawa and the MCAF Futema regulations. Soon the H-1s and the OV-10s were in the skies over Okinawa on training and utility flights. On 18 November 1969 VMO-6 came under operational control of MAG-36, ending its brief relationship with MAG-15.

Four years earlier VMO-6 had been a part of MAG-36 when it had operated from Ky Ha. During four years of combat in Vietnam, VMO-6 had distinguished itself, and could look back with pride and a sense of accomplishment at a job well done.

The squadron's leadership changed hands on 1 December 1969, when Lieutenant Colonel Charlton relinquished his command to Major Jack A. Brandon. Upon his relief, Lieutenant Colonel Charlton became the Operations Officer of MAG-36. VMO-6 flew training missions to keep its combat edge. The H-1s supported Marine ground units on the island. The OV-10s, in addition to operations in Okinawa, deployed detachments to Cubi Point for ordnance training and for use as airborne forward air controllers in numerous operations involving Marines and the U.S. Air Force.

The squadron again changed hands on 5 May 1970, when Lieutenant Colonel Albert J. Kohanowich relieved Major Brandon as commanding officer. Even though VMO-6 was stationed in Okinawa, it still supported the Vietnam war effort. It transferred replacement OV-10s to VMO-2 in Vietnam and sent a detachment of three H-1s, six Huey pilots, and 11 enlisted Marines to HMM-164 for support of the Special Landing Force (SLF). In addition to the many detachments the squadron supported, the normal activities of training continued. The enlisted men requalified with the rifle, the officers requalified with the pistol, essential subjects testing was conducted, and emphasis was placed on physical conditioning.

On 14 January 1971, Lieutenant Colonel Allan H. Bloom relieved Lieutenant Colonel Kohanowich as commanding officer. The squadron was now regularly supporting Marine training at Camp Fuji, Japan. Detachments of OV-10s would deploy to Atsugi, Japan, to serve as FAC(A) and close air support aircraft for battalions deployed to Camp Fuji.

On 12 May 1971, two OV-10 aircraft departed for the Naval Air Station, Atsugi, to support training exercises at Camp Fuji. Approaching MCAS Iwakuni, the scheduled refueling stop, the two air-

craft had a mid-air collision. The crew members ejected and were picked up at sea by the Japanese Coast Guard. Miraculously, no one was hurt, but both aircraft were lost at sea.

On 15 May 1971, Lieutenant Colonel Jerome L. Norton assumed command of VMO-6. Shortly thereafter, on 25 June, VMO-6 transferred all of its H-1 assets—pilots, maintenance personnel, and aircraft—to HML-367. For the next six months VMO-6 stressed achieving full aircraft flight time utilization, while also maintaining a comprehensive training program to increase individual proficiency and overall squadron readiness. Several months were devoted to increasing pilot readiness in the specific areas of night operations, tactical formation flying, and ordnance delivery. Aerial observer trainees received classroom instruction in map reading, radio communications, airborne forward air control, and artillery and naval gunfire spotting procedures. They were then flown locally and on deployments to apply their newly learned fundamentals in a realistic training environment.

In addition to providing support to the III MAF units on Okinawa, VMO-6 participated in III MAF support deployments to NAS Cubi Point and NAS Atsugi. Deployments were in support of the 3d Marine Division, squadrons of the 1st MAW, and ships of the Seventh Fleet. Another deployment was in support of the U.S. Air Forces, Japan, in connection with the Japan International Aerospace Show.

VMO-6 began the new year facing the realization that within six months all but three of the squadron officers, including the commanding officer and all the department heads, plus 80 percent of the enlisted personnel, were to be transferred to the United States. A rigorous program of indoctrination of new personnel in squadron operating procedures and policies was undertaken which helped ease the problems associated with a massive turnover of personnel. During March the squadron changed hands twice, once on the 13th when Major Garry Harlan relieved Lieutenant Colonel Norton, and again on 30 March, when Lieutenant Colonel Donald E. Dilley relieved Major Harlan. Harlan then assumed duties as executive officer of VMO-6.

With the increase in Communist activity in Vietnam, VMO-6 received word on 23 June to be prepared for deployment on four hours notice. Squadron personnel immediately turned to readying equipment in preparation for deployment. The squadron worked with a fury for two days when word was received to stand down. There were mixed feel-



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In September 1972, the squadron accepted five AH-1J "Sea Cobra" helicopters, and became tasked with training replacement personnel for HMA-369. The situation was short lived, however, when in early 1973 the mission and the AH-1Js were taken away.

ings of disappointment and relief, but at the same time satisfaction that the squadron had shown it was still ready to deploy on short notice if required. During September 1972, VMO-6 accepted five AH-1J "Sea Cobra" helicopters, and became once again a composite squadron. With the AH-1J, VMO-6 was able to train replacement pilots and maintenance personnel for Marine Attack Helicopter Squadron 369 (HMA-369), a recently activated helicopter squadron operating with Seventh Fleet forces in North Vietnamese waters.

The Bell AH-1J Sea Cobra was a follow-on design of the AH-1G "Huey Cobra," an armed helicopter developed by the Army and specifically designed for the gunship mission. The Cobra had a slim, streamlined fuselage which permitted higher speeds for more accurate ordnance delivery while reducing its susceptibility to enemy fire because of its narrower frontal profile. Tandem seating for the crew of two provided maximum field of view for the pilot and forward gunner. Stub wings provided attaching points for externally mounted weapons. The AH-1J differed from the single-engine AH-1G in having naval avionics and an 1,800 shaft horse power Pratt & Whitney (UACL) T400-CP-400 coupled free-turbine turboshaft power plant. (This was a military version of the UACL PT6T-3 Turbo "Twin Pac" power plant used in Bell's 212/UH-1N helicopter

models.) The engine and transmission were flat rated for 1,100 shaft horsepower continuous output, and a maximum of 1,250 shaft horsepower for take-off or 5 minutes. To compensate for the increased power, the tail rotor pylon was strengthened and the tail rotor blade enlarged. An electrically driven 20mm turret system, developed by the General Electric Company, was faired into the forward lower fuselage, and housed an XM-197 three-barrel gun, which was a lightweight version of the General Electric M-61 cannon. The AH-1J could attain speeds up to 207 miles per hour in level flight at maximum takeoff weight.⁷¹

The possession of Cobras by VMO-6 was short-lived: on 7 February 1973, the squadron transferred its last AH-1J to HMA-369. On the 16th of the month Lieutenant Colonel Dillely relinquished command of the squadron to Major Jesse N. Keathley. The squadron continued its training and deployment schedule and kept aircraft and crews continually ready for combat operations. Training emphasis was placed on aerial photography, map-reading, visual reconnaissance, formation flying, and instrument flying.

On 11 December 1973, an OV-10 piloted by Captain Raymond D. Stetser, Jr., crashed near NAS Cubi Point while on a FAC(A) training mission in support of VMA-211. Although the co-pilot, First Lieutenant John S. Crowell, ejected and received only minor injuries, Captain Stetser was fatally injured due to a late ejection.

On 21 June 1974, Major Jack R. Zellich relieved Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Finn as commanding officer of VMO-6. (Finn had taken over the squadron when he relieved Lieutenant Colonel Keathley on 12 October 1973.) Less than a month later, on 7 July 1974, Lieutenant Colonel Barry F. Skinner took command of VMO-6. Deployments to Atsugi, Cubi Point, and Korea continued. It was a rare occasion when all of the squadron personnel and aircraft were together at Futema.

In March 1975, two aircrews were sent to Tainan Air Base, Taiwan, to work with elements of the Chinese Air Force (CAF). Shortly after their arrival, on 25 March, the two aircrews were unexpectedly tasked into direct support of the Combat Air Command, Chinese Air Force. On 24 March, three CAF T-38s, with six pilots, had been lost in nearly inaccessible mountain terrain 40 miles northeast of Tainan as a result of a mid-air collision. After timely liaison with U.S. Air Force advisors and the CAF Rescue Coordination Center, the VMO-6 aircrews



Department of Defense (USMC) Photo A650511

Squadron OV-10s on their flight line at MCAS Futema, Okinawa. The unit also supported numerous operations in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

flew two sorties each in an unsuccessful search and rescue effort on the 25th and 26th of March. Although the aircrews sighted two parachutes and one apparent survivor, further rescue attempts were hampered by inclement weather, hazardous terrain, and darkness. At a squadron formation on 30 May, Captain Clifford J. Crews, Captain Richard Chandler, Captain Charles R. Donofrio, and Gunnery Sergeant Edward E. Alexander received letters of appreciation and commendation from Lieutenant General Yao Caa Yuan, CG Combat Air Command, CAF; Brigadier General Lynwood E. Clark, CG, 327th Air Division (PACAF); and Major General Norman W. Gourley, CG, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, for their search and rescue efforts.

With the entire rotary wing strength of MAG-36 committed to Operations Eagle Pull and Frequent Wing, the evacuations of Phnom Penh and Saigon respectively, VMO-6's local commitments increased during April. The additional responsibility of providing flight time to MAG-36 staff members also fell upon the squadron. As a result, the squadron devoted 65 percent of its total flight hours each month to proficiency flying for augment pilots in comparison to the previous average of 43 percent. In June, VMO-6 flew three of its 13 aircraft to NAS Cubi Point for further transfer to the United States. That was the initial reduction of aircraft assigned to the squadron.

Lieutenant Colonel Skinner relinquished his command to VMO-6's executive officer, Major Robert G. Whaley, on 18 July 1975. Major Whaley was a former member of VMO-6 and had been a member of the squadron when it first arrived in Vietnam, flying UH-1s from Ky Ha. Whaley's tour as command-

ing officer was short as Lieutenant Colonel Leland O. Waymire assumed command on 2 August 1975.

The squadron, still based at Futema, conducted local training with ground units in the central and northern training areas of Okinawa; controlled tactical aircraft in ordnance training at bombing ranges on the smaller islands of the Ryukyu Island chain; flew radar controlled simulated bombing runs to increase radar operators' proficiency; and provided lectures to ground troops on the methods of controlling aircraft. The squadron extended its range of operations by sending eight detachments, over the next several months to airfields in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines to support various sea, land, and air exercises.

On 12 July 1976, Lieutenant Colonel Larry E. Byers relieved Lieutenant Colonel Waymire as commanding officer of VMO-6. The tenure of Lieutenant Colonel Byers' command was to be short due to the scheduled deactivation of VMO-6 on 1 January 1977. In preparation for the decommissioning, personnel were no longer assigned to the squadron. Operational commitments continued to be met despite a steady decrease in personnel, but by November aircrew strength had dropped to less than one pilot per assigned aircraft.

The last command chronology submitted by VMO-6 stated, "31 December, last day in the history of VMO-6."

VMO-6 is no longer on the active Marine Corps rolls. Its many accomplishments and the men who served it faithfully through nearly five decades will not be forgotten. Its proud traditions lie waiting to inspire a new generation of Marines should the need arise to uncase the colors.

NOTES

The principal primary source materials used in the preparation of this history are held by two agencies. The National Archives, hereafter NA, holds pre-1940 materials relating to the Marine Corps (Record Group 127) at its Washington, D.C. location. The History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., hereafter Hist&MusDiv, holds post-1940 materials which may be sighted at the Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Building 58, Washington Navy Yard, Washington D.C..

The Early Years

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from microfilm copies of unit muster rolls located at the Hist&MusDiv, and Records of the Bureau of Aeronautics (RG 72), Monthly Summary Reports of the Aviation Statistics Section Relating to the Quantity, Type, and Location of Naval Aircraft ("Status of Naval Aircraft"), 1926-1940, located at the NA.

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2. Ibid., pp. 51-52.
3. HQ, AS, 2d Brig, Weekly OpsRpt dtd 23Feb28, pp.3-4 (1165-65-55, RG 127, NA).
4. Maj E.H. Brainard, USMC, "Marine Corps Aviation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 13, no. 1 (Mar28), pp. 25-36.
5. Maj Ross E. Rowell, USMC, "Annual Report of Aircraft Squadrons, Second Brigade, U.S. Marine Corps, July 1, 1927 to June 20, 1928," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 13, no. 4 (Dec28), pp. 248-265.
6. Ibid.
7. Copy of CMC Ltr AA-109-ems dtd 17Aug28, to CNO (1165, folder A3-1, RG 127, NA).
8. Copy of CMC Ltr AA-133-ems dtd 5Sep28, to CO, AS, E.C.E.F. (2385-25/2, folder A3-1, RG 127, NA).
9. HQ, AS, ECEF, Weekly OpsRpt (1165-65-55-50 to 1165-65-55/2-4, RG 127, NA).
10. Gordon Swanborough, and Peter M. Bowets, *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911*, 2d ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1968), p. 390.
11. Ibid., pp. 135-136.
12. HQ, AS, ECEF, Report of Participation of VO-6M in Fourth Canadian Air Pageant, Montreal, Canada—and the National Air

Races, Cleveland, Ohio, dtd 9Sep32 (1165-10 to 1165-50, RG 127, NA).

13. CMC Ltr AA-140-ems, dtd 20Oct32 to CNO (1165-10 to 1165-50, RG 127, NA).

14. CNO Ltr Op-38-E-EMW, VZ/A3-1 (320506), dtd 16Nov32 to CMC (1165-10 to 1165-50, RG 127, NA).

World War II and China Service

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the VMO-6 World War II War Diaries, hereafter VMO-6 WW II War Diary, and the VMO-6 History of Unit, which are held by the Hist&MusDiv (accession no. 64A-3731).

15. Marine Corps Schools, USMC, *Marine Corps Aviation, General* (Quantico, 1943), pp. 5, 22-23.
16. *Jane's All The World's Aircraft, 1943-1944* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd.) p. 229c., hereafter *Jane's* and date.
17. VMO-6, WW II War Diary, Mar45.
18. Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation; History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, vol. V (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1968), p.89, hereafter Frank, *Victory and Occupation*.
19. Ibid., p.376.
20. Maj Donald R. Garrett, Comments on draft ms, 30Sep81 (Comment File, MCHC).
21. Frank, *Victory and Occupation*, p.377.
22. BGen F.P. Henderson, Comments on draft ms, 7Jul81 (Comment File, MCHC).
23. Ibid.
24. VMO-6, WW II War Diary, Jun45.
25. Ibid., Jul46.

Korea and the Advent of Helicopters

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from VMO-6 Historical Diaries, hereafter VMO-6 HistD which are held by the Hist&MusDiv (accession no. 65A-4620).

26. Lynn Montross and Capt Nicholas A. Canzona, *The Pusan Perimeter: U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953*, vol. 1 (Washington: HistBr, G-3 DW, HQMC, 1954), pp. 1-18, hereafter Montross, *The Pusan Perimeter*

27. Ibid, pp. 37-54.
28. Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 Historical Report (1 July - 31 December 1950) p. 1, (Hist&MusDiv, accession no. 65A-4620).
29. Montross, *The Pusan Perimeter*, p. 50.
30. MajGen Victor A. Armstrong, Comments on draft ms, 17Jul81 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Armstrong comments.
31. *Jane's*, 1949-1950, p. 277c.
32. Armstrong comments.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Col Gene "W" Morrison, Comments on draft ms, 14Jul81 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Morrison comments.
36. Ibid.
37. VMO-6, HistD, Oct50.
38. Armstrong and Morrison comments.
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40. Ibid., Nov50.
41. *Jane's*, 1951-1952, p. 201c., and Morrison comments.
42. *Jane's*, msr 1952, p. 211c.
43. LtCol Wallace J. Slappey Jr., Comments on draft ms, 7Sep81 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Slappey comments.
44. Ibid.
45. *Jane's*, 1951-1952, p. 290c.
46. Slappey comments.
47. *Jane's*, 1951-1952, p. 201c.

Pendleton Once More

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the base newspaper, *The Pendleton Scout*, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, California. Heavy reliance on this source of reference material was required because of the temporary discontinuance of unit historical reporting from 1954 until 1965.

48. *Jane's*, 1955-1956, p. 271.
49. LtCol Joseph L. Freitas, Comments on draft ms, 28Jun81 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Freitas comments.
50. "VMO Grasshoppers Cover Pendleton, Act as Eyes of the First Division," *The Pendleton Scout*, 27Jan61, p. 2.
51. Sergeant C.C. Stibbens, "Sgt. Charles R. Hern," *The Pendleton Scout*, 7Apr61, p. 4.

52. "VMO-6 Celebrates 10,000 Accident Free Flying Hours," *The Pendleton Scout*, 10Aug62, p. 4.
53. Maj Leonard A. Miller, Comments on draft ms, 8Jun81 (Comment File, MCHC).
54. Freitas comments.
55. "Plane Crash Kills Pilot: Rescue Attempts Barred," *The Pendleton Scout*, 25Oct62, p. 4.
56. *Jane's*, 1963-1964, p. 175.
57. Col Robert J. Zitnik, Comments on draft ms, 26Jun81 (Comment File, MCHC), hereafter Zitnik comments.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.

Combat: Vietnam

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the Marine Aircraft Group 36 Command Chronology (ComdC), and the VMO-6 ComdC, which are held by the Hist&MusDiv.

61. Zitnik comments.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Maj Stephen W. Pless award citation and background materials, (RefSec, MCHC).
65. Captain Moyers S. Shore II, *The Battle For Khe Sanh*, (Washington: HistBr, G-3 Div, HQMC, 1969), pp. 84-86.
66. *Jane's*, 1964-1965, p. 198.
67. VMO-6 ComdC, 12Jul68.
68. *Jane's*, 1966-1967, pp. 296-297.
69. LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon, USMC, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962-1970," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* (Naval Review Edition), v. 97, no. 819 (May71), p. 151.
70. VMO-6 ComdC, 24 Apr 69.

Tenancy on Okinawa and Decommissioning

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section was derived from the VMO-6 ComdC.

71. *Jane's*, 1968-1969, p. 222.

Appendix A

CHRONOLOGY

- 1 December 1920 Flight E, 3d Air Squadron established at Marine Barracks, Quantico, Virginia.
- 24 August 1922 Flight E, 3d Air Squadron redesignated Division 1, Fighting Squadron 1, First Aviation Group, Quantico, Virginia.
- 1 September 1925 Division 1, Fighting Squadron 1 redesignated Division 1, Observation Squadron 3.
- 1 July 1927 Division 1, Observation Squadron 3, redesignated Division 1, Observation Squadron 6, East Coast Expeditionary Force, Quantico, Virginia.
- 27 January 1928 Departed for expeditionary duty in Nicaragua.
- 16 February-1 September 1928 Assigned to Air Squadrons, 2d Brigade for counter-insurgency operations against the Sandinista rebels.
- 1 September 1928 Administratively transferred from Air Squadrons, 2d Brigade to East Coast Expeditionary Force, Quantico, Virginia.
- 30 June 1933 Deactivated at Quantico, Virginia.
- 20 November 1944 Reactivated as Marine Observation Squadron 6 at Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Virginia
- 1 January 1945 Relocated to Marine Corps Air Depot, Miramar, San Diego, California, and reassigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast.
- January-February 1945 Deployed to Guadalcanal and reassigned to Aircraft, FMF.
- 1 March 1945 Reassigned to 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- March-July 1945 Participated in the Okinawa Campaign.
- 25 July 1945 Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 21, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing.
- October 1945 Deployed to Tsingtao, China, and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 32, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- May 1946 Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 25, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 1 June 1946 Reassigned to Headquarters, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 20 December 1946 Reassigned to the 7th Marines (Rein), 1st Marine Division (Rein).
- January 1947 Relocated to Camp Pendleton, California, and reassigned to Marine Air, West Coast.
- 1 October 1947 Reassigned to 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- July-August 1950 Deployed to Pusan, Korea.
- August 1950-March 1955 Participated in the Korean conflict operating from Pusan, Chinhae, Incheon, Yonpo, and Pohang-dong.
- March-April 1955 Relocated to Camp Pendleton, California.
- 22 April 1955 Reassigned to Air, FMF Pacific.

- 15 September 1955 Reassigned to 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 5 February 1956 Reassigned to Marine Wing Headquarters Group, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- 1 July 1956 Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 36, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing.
- November 1962 Detachment participated in operations relating to the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- August 1965 Deployed to Republic of Vietnam and reassigned to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.
- September 1965-October 1969 Participated in the war in Vietnam operating from Da Nang, Ky Ha, Chu Lai, Phu Bai, and Quang Tri.
- October 1969 Relocated to Marine Corps Air Facility, Futema, Okinawa and reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 15.
- November 1969 Reassigned to Marine Aircraft Group 36.
- 1 January 1977 Deactivated at Marine Corps Air Station, Futema, Okinawa.

Appendix B

COMMANDING OFFICERS

2dLt Robert H. Rhoads	1 Jul 1927-7 Jul 1927
1stLt Jay D. Swartwout	8 Jul 1927-10 Aug 1927
1stLt Horace C. Busbey	11 Aug 1927-27 Sep 1927
Capt William C. Byrd	28 Sep 1927-7 Mar 1928
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	8 Mar 1928-19 Jul 1928
2dLt James B. McHugh	20 Jul 1928-31 Aug 1928
2dLt John S.E. Young	1 Sep 1928-12 Sep 1928
1stLt William R. Hughes	13 Sep 1928-3 Oct 1928
Capt John B. Neill Jr.	4 Oct 1928-23 Dec 1928
1stLt Hayne D. Boyden	24 Dec 1928-30 Dec 1928
Capt John B. Neill Jr.	31 Dec 1928-4 Jan 1929
Chief Marine Gunner William L. Erdman	5 Jan 1929-17 Jan 1929
Capt Russell A. Presley	18 Jan 1929-14 May 1929
1stLt William R. Hughes	15 May 1929-22 May 1929
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	23 May 1929-31 May 1929
1stLt Stephen A. McClellan	1 Jun 1929-9 Jun 1929
2dLt William P. Youngs	10 Jun 1929
2dLt Frank M. June	11 Jun 1929-12 Jun 1929
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	13 Jun 1929-1 Jul 1929
1stLt Vernon M. Guymon	2 Jul 1929-2 Sep 1929
1stLt William G. Manley	3 Sep 1929
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	4 Sep 1929-10 Jan 1930
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	11 Jan 1930-18 Jan 1930
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	19 Jan 1930-29 Jan 1930
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	30 Jan 1930
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	31 Jan 1930-22 Jun 1930
2dLt Raymond C. Scollin	23 Jun 1930-24 Jun 1930
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	25 Jun 1930-8 Aug 1930
Capt Harold C. Major	9 Aug 1930-11 Aug 1930
1stLt George H. Towner Jr.	12 Aug 1930-13 Aug 1930

Capt Harold C. Major	14 Aug 1930-10 Sep 1930
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	11 Sep 1930-28 Sep 1930
2dLt Walter L.J. Bayler	29 Sep 1930-1 Oct 1930
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	2 Oct 1930-21 Dec 1930
2dLt Walter L.J. Bayler	22 Dec 1930-10 Jan 1931
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	11 Jan 1931-14 Jan 1931
1stLt Pierson E. Conradt	15 Jan 1931-20 Feb 1931
1stLt Donald G. Willis	21 Feb 1931-23 Feb 1931
1stLt Pierson E. Conradt	24 Feb 1931-9 Mar 1931
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	10 Mar 1931-14 Mar 1931
1stLt Pierson E. Conradt	15 Mar 1931-31 Mar 1931
1stLt William O. Brice	1 Apr 1931-7 Apr 1931
1stLt Pierson E. Conradt	8 Apr 1931-9 Apr 1931
1stLt William O. Brice	10 Apr 1931-9 May 1931
1stLt Pierson E. Conradt	10 May 1931-16 May 1931
1stLt William O. Brice	17 May 1931-2 Jul 1931
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	3 Jul 1931-31 Aug 1931
1stLt Albert D. Cooley	1 Sep 1931-2 Sep 1931
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	3 Sep 1931-8 Sep 1931
1stLt William O. Brice	9 Sep 1931-1 Oct 1931
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	2 Oct 1931-2 Mar 1932
1stLt Frank M. June	3 Mar 1932-2 Apr 1932
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	3 Apr 1932-18 Aug 1932
1stLt Erwin G. Taylor	19 Aug 1932-22 Aug 1932
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	23 Aug 1932-26 Aug 1932
1stLt Erwin G. Taylor	27 Aug 1932-6 Sep 1932
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	7 Sep 1932-2 Jan 1933
1stLt Erwin G. Taylor	3 Jan 1933-7 Jan 1933
1stLt David L. Cloud Jr.	8 Jan 1933-9 Jan 1933
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	10 Jan 1933-6 Feb 1933
1stLt Erwin G. Taylor	7 Feb 1933-23 Feb 1933
2dLt Frank G. Dailey	24 Feb 1933-28 Feb 1933
1stLt Erwin G. Taylor	1 Mar 1933-5 Mar 1933
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell	6 Mar 1933-28 Mar 1933
2dLt Frank G. Daily	29 Mar 1933-2 Apr 1933
1stLt Clarence J. Chappell*	3 Apr 1933-30 Jun 1933

*Many of the officers listed above served in the capacity of "acting commanding officer," however our only complete and official source—the unit muster rolls—fails to make any distinction in this matter.

1stLt Thomas G. Alderson	20 Nov 1944-22 Nov 1944
Capt Donald R. Garrett	23 Nov 1944-16 Sep 1945
Capt Joe W. Fitts, Jr.	17 Sep 1945-14 Dec 1945
1stLt Edward S. John	15 Dec 1945-25 May 1946

Capt Richard B. Cropley 26 May 1946-21 Aug 1946
 Capt James N. Cupp 22 Aug 1946-23 Oct 1946
 Capt Richard B. Cropley 24 Oct 1946-12 Dec 1946
 Capt Harold F. Brown 13 Dec 1946-19 Apr 1948
 Capt Richard B. Cropley 20 Apr 1948-20 Oct 1948

 Maj Robert G. Howie 21 Oct 1948-1 Jul 1950
 Capt William C. Parker, Jr. 2 Jul 1950
 Maj Vincent J. Gottschalk 3 Jul 1950-31 Mar 1951
 Capt Clarence W. Parkins 1 Apr 1951-4 Apr 1951
 Maj David W. McFarland 5 Apr 1951-5 Oct 1951

 Maj Allen H. Ringblom 6 Oct 1951-31 Oct 1951
 Maj Kenneth C. Smedley 1 Nov 1951-25 Nov 1951
 Maj Edward R. Polgrean 26 Nov 1951-30 Jan 1952
 Maj Kenneth C. Smedley 31 Jan 1952-10 Feb 1952
 Maj William C. McLean, Jr. 11 Feb 1952-26 Feb 1952

 LtCol William T. Herring 27 Feb 1952-9 May 1952
 Maj Wallace J. Slappey, Jr. 10 May 1952-10 Sep 1952
 LtCol Elkin S. Dew 11 Sep 1952-2 Feb 1953
 LtCol William A. Cloman, Jr. 3 Feb 1953-30 Jun 1953
 LtCol Earl E. Anderson 1 Jul 1953-7 Dec 1953

 LtCol John H. King, Jr. 8 Dec 1953-31 May 1954
 LtCol Matt S. Ober, Jr. 1 Jun 1954-20 Sep 1954
 Maj Robert L. Rathbun 21 Sep 1954-7 Dec 1954
 Maj Leonard A. Miller 8 Dec 1954-19 May 1955
 Maj Mont L. Beamon 20 May 1955-6 Oct 1956

 Maj Clifford W. Buckingham 7 Oct 1956-17 Sep 1957
 LtCol Harold F. Brown 18 Sep 1957-20 Sep 1959
 LtCol Clyde S. Stewart 21 Sep 1959-1 Mar 1961
 Maj Arnold W. Barden 2 Mar 1961-22 Jul 1961
 LtCol Henry K. Bruce 23 Jul 1961-23 Feb 1963

 LtCol Joseph L. Freitas, Jr. 24 Feb 1963-23 Feb 1964
 LtCol George F. Bauman 24 Feb 1964-21 Feb 1965
 LtCol Robert J. Zitnik 22 Feb 1965-22 Mar 1966
 Maj Robert E. Presson 23 Mar 1966-10 Jun 1966
 Maj William J. Goodsell 11 Jun 1966-16 Jun 1966

 Maj Rawley M. Gregory 17 Jun 1966-22 Jul 1966
 Maj William R. Maloney 23 Jul 1966-26 Mar 1967
 LtCol Joseph A. Nelson 27 Mar 1967-16 Sep 1967
 LtCol William J. White 17 Sep 1967-24 Mar 1968
 Maj Bertram A. Maas 25 Mar 1968-20 Sep 1968

 Maj Hans A. Zander 21 Sep 1968-1 Apr 1969
 LtCol Billy D. Bouldin 2 Apr 1969-17 Jun 1969
 Maj Albert K. Charlton 18 Jun 1969-30 Nov 1969
 Maj Jack A. Brandon 1 Dec 1969-5 May 1970
 LtCol Albert J. Kohanowich 6 May 1970-13 Jan 1971

LtCol Allan H. Bloom	14 Jan 1971-14 May 1971
LtCol Jerome L. Norton	15 May 1971-14 Mar 1972
Maj Garry Harlan	15 Mar 1972-29 Mar 1972
LtCol Donald E. Dilley	30 Mar 1972-16 Mar 1973
Maj Jesse N. Keathley	17 Mar 1973-12 Oct 1973
LtCol Robert C. Finn	13 Oct 1973-21 Jun 1974
Maj Jack R. Zellich	22 Jun 1974-9 Jul 1974
LtCol Barry F. Skinner	10 Jul 1974-17 Jul 1975
Maj Robert G. Whaley	18 Jul 1975-2 Aug 1975
LtCol Leland O. Waymire	3 Aug 1975-12 Jul 1976
LtCol Larry E. Byers	13 Jul 1976-31 Dec 1976

Appendix C

HONORS

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH FOUR BRONZE STARS

World War II, Okinawa, 1 April - 21 June 1945
Korea, 2 August 1950 - 27 July 1953
Korea, 7 August - 7 September 1950
Korea, 15 September - 11 October 1950
Vietnam, 1 September 1965 - 24 April 1967 and 6 June - 15 September 1967

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (ARMY) STREAMER

Korea, 22 November - 14 December 1950

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Korea, 1 August 1952 - 27 July 1953
Vietnam, 4 September 1965 - 24 August 1966
Vietnam, 16 April - 16 October 1968

MERITORIOUS UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER

Vietnam, 17 October 1968 - 30 June 1969

SECOND NICARAGUAN CAMPAIGN STREAMER

16 February - 31 August 1928

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

Okinawa Gunto Operation, 1 April - 30 June 1945

WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

20 November 1944 - 31 December 1946

CHINA SERVICE STREAMER

12 October 1945 - 3 January 1947

KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER STARS

North Korean Aggression, 2 August - 2 November 1950
Inchon Landing, 13 - 17 September 1950
Communist China Aggression, 3 November 1950 - 24 January 1951

First UN Counteroffensive, 25 January - 21 April 1951
Communist China Spring Offensive, 22 April - 8 July 1951
UN Summer-Fall Offensive, 9 July - 27 November 1951
Second Korean Winter, 28 November 1951 - 30 April 1952
Korean Defense, Summer-Fall 1952, 1 May - 30 November 1952
Third Korean Winter, 1 December 1952 - 30 April 1953
Korea, Summer-Fall 1953, 1 May - 27 July 1953

NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR
27 June 1950 - 27 June 1954
1 January 1961 - 15 August 1974

ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY STREAMER
Cuba, 7 November - 29 November 1962

VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER STARS
Vietnam Defense Campaign, 1 September - 24 December 1965
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Campaign, 25 December 1965 - 30 June 1966
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase II, 1 July 1966 - 31 May 1967
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase III, 1 June 1967 - 29 January 1968
Tet Counteroffensive, 30 January - 1 April 1968
Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase IV, 2 April - 30 June 1968
Vietnamese Counteroffensive, Phase V, 1 July - 1 November 1968
Vietnamese Counteroffensive Operation, Phase VI, 2 November 1968 - 22 February 1969
Tet 69 Counteroffensive, 23 February - 8 June 1969
Vietnam, Summer-Fall Campaign 1969, 9 June - 12 October 1969

KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER
Korea, 2 August 1950 - 27 July 1953

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION GALLANTRY CROSS COLOR
Vietnam, 1 September 1965 - 20 September 1969

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION CIVIL ACTIONS COLOR
21 September 1969 - 12 October 1969

Appendix D

MEDAL OF HONOR

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR to

MAJOR STEPHEN W. PLESS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a helicopter gunship pilot attached to Marine Observation Squadron Six in action against enemy forces near Quang Ngai, Republic of Vietnam, on 19 August 1967. During an escort mission Major (then Captain)



Major Stephen W. Pless

Pless monitored an emergency call that four American soldiers stranded on a nearby beach, were being overwhelmed by a large Viet Cong force. Major Pless flew to the scene and found 30 to 50 enemy soldiers in the open. Some of the enemy were bayoneting and beating the downed Americans. Major Pless displayed exceptional airmanship as he launched a devastating attack against the enemy force, killing or wounding many of the enemy and driving the remainder back into a treeline. His rocket and machine gun attacks were made at such low levels that the aircraft flew through debris created by explosions from its rockets. Seeing one of the wounded soldiers gesture for assistance, he maneuvered his helicopter into a position between the wounded men and the enemy, providing a shield which permitted his crew to retrieve the wounded. During the rescue the enemy directed intense fire at the helicopter and rushed the aircraft again and again, closing to within a few feet before being beaten back. When the wounded men were aboard, Major Pless maneuvered the helicopter out to sea. Before it became safely airborne, the overloaded aircraft settled four times into the water. Displaying superb airmanship, he finally got the helicopter aloft. Major Pless' extraordinary heroism coupled with his outstanding flying skill prevented the annihilation of the tiny force. His courageous actions reflect great credit upon himself and uphold the greatest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Appendix E

SQUADRON INSIGNIA

During the early years the insignia displayed on VO-6M aircraft was the standard Marine Corps emblem of "eagle, globe, and anchor." This insignia was common to all Marine Corps aircraft.*



The first officially approved squadron insignia reflected the "grasshopper" tradition of Marine Corps observation squadrons. The combination of an insect-like appearance and the general misuse of the "Grasshopper" designation for Marine observation aircraft, as well as an operational routine requiring flights in and out of small, unprepared fields did much to perpetuate this tradition.

The use of the "cat" came about in the early 1950s, and although minor variations crept in, the "cat" design became synonymous with VMO-6.



*During the "airshow" era of the early 1930s the VO-6M demonstration team did wear an insignia on their flight jackets. The insignia was a seven inch circle with a border in white of one inch and a center field of red. "VO-6M" was in black letters at the top and "Hell-Divers" at the bottom of the white border. A diving, sepia-colored Helldiver was centered on the patch. (No photographs or drawings of this insignia could be located.)



Connotations about the unit's missions of observation, forward air control (FAC(A)), medical evacuation, and gunship were provided through equipment depicted in the various insignia versions such as: binoculars, "flashes" emitting from a radio antenna, the stretcher, and the rocket. The propeller "speed lines" on the "cat's" tail symbolized a helicopter tail-rotor and represented the influence of helicopters in the squadron.



In 1972 a temporary, but radical, change was made in the unit's insignia. This new design was heavily influenced by the prominence of the FAC(A) mission and the use of the OV-10 "Bronco" to carry that mission out. However, in 1975 the squadron returned to the use of the "cat" insignia, citing the tradition and legend surrounding the "cat" and a desire to reestablish a link to the heritage of the VMO-6 Marines of Korea and Vietnam.



Appendix F

VMO-6'S HELICOPTER PIONEERS

Marine Observation Squadron 6 made aviation history by proving on the battlefields of Korea the great military utility of the helicopter. Listed below

are the names of those pioneer helicopter personnel who transferred from Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 (HMX-1) to VMO-6 in July 1950, for duty in Korea.

Capt Victor A. Armstrong
1stLt Arthur R. Bancroft
1stLt Lloyd J. Engelhardt
Capt George B. Farish
1stLt Robert A. Longstaff
1stLt Gustave F. Lueddeke Jr.
1stLt Max Nebergall
Capt Eugene J. Pope

PFC James E. Bailey
Sgt James E. Barnitz
PFC Leonard H. Birney
Pvt Francis G. Bonin
Cpl John S. Boyden
Cpl George J. Burns
PFC Robert F. Burrow
PFC Charles A. Chapman
Sgt Harold W. Cleveland
PFC Luther B. Cook
SSgt William F. Coret
Sgt Gene T. Elliot
Cpl George A. Gorse
TSgt Daniel W. Hall Jr.
PFC Robert C. Heron

Cpl John A. Kaczmarek
TSgt Charles A. King Jr.
SSgt Herbert J. Kroeger
TSgt Walter E. Lander Sr.
Cpl Edwin F. Lester
PFC Harold Mayes
Sgt Donald G. Myers
PFC Avery C. Norris
SSgt Edward J. Oliver Jr.
Cpl Douglas Petty
PFC Paul N. Rooney
PFC Edward W. Smith
PFC William G. Toerne
PFC James D. Westendorf
PFC Joseph H. Wilson Jr.

The squadron insignia of VMO-6 is shown on the back cover. For a detailed history of the insignia and other illustrations see Appendix E.

